

Silverwings and Toothless

by white aspen

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Summary: Sequel to 'Toothless and the dragoness'. A year later. Silverwings waits for Toothless, a father of five now. Only the secret of his flight can still tear their love apart. Toothless wants her to come to Berk. A solitary taiga-dwelling dragoness? Read about Night Fury love.

1. Waiting for Nighthawk

****Silverwings and Toothless ****

****Introduction**

>This story is a sequel to 'Toothless and the dragoness'. In that story, which took place **13** years after the movie HTTYD 1, it is told how Toothless finds a mate (Silverwings), seen from Hiccup's point of view.

>This story is told from Silverwings' point of view. She awaits Toothless who promised to come visit her a year after their mating period together, when they greatly fell in love. She learned his real name: Nighthawk. Together they have five children.
Silverwings is nervous about the fact that Nighthawk is going to reveal to her the secret of his flight. She doesn't understand how he is able to fly with half a tailfin gone. Nighthawk was reluctant to tell her last year but promised to show her once he found her again. But he feared to reveal it, as it could tear their love apart.

>She has no idea that Toothless and Hiccup hope to take her and her yearlings back to Berk. This solitary taiga-dwelling dragoness doesn't know about other ways of life. So what would that mean to her? ****

****Thanks!****

>I am incredible happy and grateful that a couple of talented people help me bring this story to life. A big thank you to **'Tagesh'** who does a great job in editing. We have a most valued collaboration and have super fun in the process. He followed ****'Spidermaster'**** up, who managed to edit the first 2

chapters before writing his own story absorbed him. Thank you Spidermaster.

>To 'Laryssadesenhista' I will be forever grateful. She made a beautiful illustration of Toothless and Silverwings as a loving pair (see link below) which she gave to me. Thank you, Laryssa, it means the world to me.

****A remark on geography: ****Silverwings and Toothless had their mating period in the north of Sweden, but this story starts at the location of Silverwings' nest, in the Taiga of Karelia, below the White Sea. That is in Russia, close to the border of Finland.

****Disclaimer:**** the general setting and most of the characters belong to Cressida Cowell and DreamWorks. Silverwings and her yearlings, Kjell, Gunna, and some other dragons and people from Berk are created by me.

****oOoOoOoOoOo****

****Chapter 1. Waiting for Nighthawk****

****_Come, my love. Find me!_****

>I grew ever more impatient. He had promised to return when the moon waxed to its full in mid-summer again. Nighthawk, my lover. Oh, how I yearn for him. Not with the bodily longing of mating heat anymore, as that had subsided of course. But still a strong, intense pull remained. To my surprise I had come to love this strange male, who first said his name was Toothless, before he paused and said "No, my name is Nighthawk, that's my real name."<p>

Would he even come? He had promised so last year, but he also said that he must come from very far away. That had been confusing, because he cannot fly and can only walk and run. So, how could he have come from very far away? I had asked him many questions. So many, that finally he told me "I came here flying. I can fly in a way. But I cannot show you now."

That remark had me baffled and I assailed him with even more questions. Finally he said that if he managed to find me again, he would reveal the secret of his flight to me. But he also said that he feared to reveal it to me. "It could tear our love apart" he had whispered with a worried expression on his face.

That made me suspicious, and I pressed him with even more questions.

>"Is it anything magical?" I asked. I had heard stories about spellweaver dragons from far away, although I did not know if that meant far away in distance or far away in the past.
At that, his eyes had gone unfocused. A soft, almost sweet look erased the worry that had been on his face. "No" he said "at least not in the way you think. Yet to me it has been magical."

>But I insisted "Is anything bad or wicked involved, or anything dangerous?" Because if nothing bad was involved, why could it make me stop loving him?
"No, far from that" Nighthawk had replied "but you will find it hard nonetheless, if you see how I am able to fly. Very hard."

>I had been somewhat comforted, not because of his words, but because of the soft look in his eyes. Still I did not understand. He had then faced me and with eyes overflowing with love and worry had added "I just hope so very, very much that you will be able to accept

it."<p>

My anxiousness about Nighthawk's secret was pushed to the back of my mind by the hatching of my five sweetlings and their rearing. But now, while I awaited his arrival, it came to mind again, causing worry to eat into my joyous expectations.

Within days, if he could track me, I would hear his explanation. I had told him how to find me. That my nesting place was somewhere near to a range of low hills in the otherwise flat taiga, next to a big river, surging in the direction of the White Cold. I had promised to stay there, or return there at the right moon.

****My children**

>My yearlings are playing in front of me. I had nearly burst with joy when they hatched, their little voices peeping. They had already softly chirped to me when they were still in their eggs*, and I had warbled back to them, so that we knew each other already before their hatching.

But it is a secret to my heart that I felt them even earlier. Only a few days after I left Nighthawk to return to my mother's nesting place, I suddenly had a kind of flash, or vision, while flying. Five dots of varying colour swirled around me, and it was as if I faintly heard sweet, jubilant voices. It made me nearly drop from the sky!

>Since then I knew five souls had come to live within me, so it was no surprise to me that I laid five eggs. But this vision is a secret to my heart; I wouldn't know how to tell anyone, even Nighthawk. It's something intimate between me and the little ones that shared my body.<p>

So after hatching, there they were: Night Furies in miniature. Adorable with their stubby little tails and tiny little wings not yet in proportion. Their colouring was not yet the mature black, but a mottled dark grey, which makes them nearly invisible to the eye when we are out among the trees and shrubs. Oh, I could go on about them, how after a week their eyes began to focus, or how one of them flapped the little wings for the first time. Pangs of pride and joy in my motherly heart.

They have grown rapidly since. They are able to speak for some months already. In size, their bodies minus the tail are about the lower half of my forepaw now. And they are always tumbling around, attacking each other in play and wrestling about all over the place. Three females and two males. I gave them their childhood names: Fireweed, Pinecone and Heather for the females and Boulder and Tumble for the males.

And these yearlings are his, Nighthawk's. Much heat and love went into starting their tiny flames of life. Maybe that's why they are sparkling little souls, glowing with health, all five of them. Feeding them hasn't been a problem as there is game in abundance. So I had plenty of time for musing, even after cleaning the nest of their soils and applying fresh layers of moss. But already they have learned to go out in the bushes and bury it, although they still have some accidents.

****Old wounds heal**

>Oh, to see them play. Darting this way and that, tackling

each other, then collapsing and napping in one big heap. Such a joy having them.

>Finally, after all these years, the old wound healed of losing my first clutch of eggs to a bear. It had been devastating. I had been off only for a short time, to grab a bite. After finding the ruined nest and the empty eggshells, I had crumpled on the spot, unable to chase the beast and kill it.<p>

My happiness also took away much of the pain of my second mating period. For no mate had come to my calling. I had called for nearly a full moon cycle, until in the end all I did was sob to the sky. It had taken another moon cycle after that for the half-formed eggs to dissolve in my body again. A pain, not to the body, but to my heart. I grieved for a long time. No exciting mating, not the least bit of bodily contact. And again seven years without the hatchlings that my heart ached for. I had grown bitter after that. It had been the end of 'Happywings' as my first mate had called me.

My first mate, Thundercloud. My mentor and guide. I still thank him for his loving guidance in my first mating, when he shared with me freely of his body and his wisdom. What would I have done without his guidance, when in my third mating period a male came running into my life instead of flying? I had come so close to rejecting Nighthawk. He hardly had any manners and on top of that, he was a cripple with no flight. And now he fills my heart and soul. But, with all my love for Nighthawk, I also carry the memory of Thundercloud in love and gratitude. It had been one of his lessons, that "one love does not diminish another".

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****Review, please. Make me happy. ****

* Hatchlings chirping from within their eggs. I saw that on a nature documentary on alligators. Whether the gator-mum grunted back, I don't recall. But I very much liked to use this detail in my story.

****For the illustration of Laryssadesenhista**** browse whiteaspen on Deviantart. Click 'Favourites' open and find the picture 'Toothless and Silverwings'.

See also several other wonderful drawings that I collected there.

>For hatchlings, see
>- Night Fury Hatchlings by ~Mietschie, and
>- baby toothless by ~chibignoufs.

For ****yearlings****, see:
>- Baby Night Furies by ~Moosel5
>- Toothless-dragon ~tetrapercu

2. The secret of his flight

****Chapter 2. The secret of his flight ****

****On the look-out****

>Nighthawk could arrive any day now. So I prepared the children and told them "Someone is coming to visit me. If he comes you will

retreat to the nest and stay hidden until I return. Much like when I go out to hunt." I could not bring myself to tell them that it was their father. If things didn't work out, I would come up with some story. They were excited, but as I kept my reactions hidden, they soon were engrossed in play again.<p>

For days already, I had hunted early in the morning, so that the yearlings had their bellies full and were content for the rest of the day. Also, I often travelled to a higher vantage point to keep a look-out for Nighthawk, but I could only stay away from the children for so long. Standing in front of the nest I still could see patches of sky and I longingly looked up every now and then. Often I would concentrate and send out a silent message, hoping that somehow it would guide him: _I'm here. This is how my hills look. Find me, love._

My nest is in a small cave at the foot of the hills. In front of it lies a vast expanse of taiga, which is forest, dotted with lakes, but much less dense than in warmer regions. And there's heather, lichen, shrubs and bushes. And flowers, though the multitude of flowers of spring had faded away already. I like it here, having the wide world at my feet and the vastness of the sky overhead, where at times beautiful lights simmer and dance against the backdrop of the stars. Then I fly up to hunt these lights, only to end up dancing along.

As I looked at the sky again something caught my eye: seemingly a small flock of birds. I only saw them for a moment before they disappeared behind the treetops. Large birds? Migratory birds in summer? Then, faintly, I heard cries, calls. My heart skipped a beat, could it be? Before I knew I called back, as loud as I could. Then a loud call in answer!

Immediately I turned around to the yearlings. "Quick, children, into hiding." They ran into the cave, but also peeped a lot of sudden questions. "Sh, shhhh, sweetlings" I whispered after they had hopped into the nest "I will tell you when I return. You are all so smart! I know you will stay in the nest." Luckily their hiding instinct was still very strong, so before long they were quiet and in the half-sleep of hiding. I breathed over them and left.

Once out in the open I first scanned the surroundings with every sense I had. I had been stupid to call out like that in front of the nest. Nothing out of the ordinary, though. Every predator around knew better than to enter my territory. The few that did are not alive anymore. Yet I took care to run a distance away from the nest with stealth, to not further give away its position. At a safe distance I called out again. Answering calls! Definitely the voice of Nighthawk! A rustle of wings, a black form swooping over me, a shout "Silverwings! Follow me, I'll land over there" and he disappeared, his silhouette broken by some treetops.
>Why not land here? Strange.

I made a mental note of his direction then started to run, because suddenly I had the crazy notion of running into _his _life. No, back to a walking pace, as suddenly my heart hammered in my chest and I had to calm myself. Or even better, I would stalk him! Surprise him! Although first I had to establish he was not aggressive. You never know with a male out of mating season. So I slid through the trees silently and slipped from shadow to shadow.

There he stood. Near to a boulder, one of numerous large boulders strewn erratically across the land. This one, however, was exceptionally large. To my surprise he was frantically cleansing himself with a fire bath, keeping one eye at the sky, expecting me to come in flying. While breathing fire over himself and washing his hide in flames, he gave special attention to his neck, chest and tailfin. I hesitated to show myself, wanting to give him time for something he deemed necessary.

>Why do you erase your smell, my love? So strange. Always there is strangeness with you.
_But he clearly was not aggressive, instead rather nervous. Like I was.

****The secret of his flight****

>Stealthily I retreated somewhat, only to step out of the trees noisily once he had finished the bath. His head turned my way.
"SILVERWINGS!" he shouted, wings opening wide immediately.

>I rushed up to him, unable to contain myself any longer. Here he was, pressed against my body, stammering incoherent words "...my darlingâ€| youâ€| my loveâ€|", inhaling my scent. Our foreheads met and by the pressure Nighthawk applied I felt his happiness. I responded in turn. We rubbed our necks past each other, letting our heads curl around. We sniffed, licked.
"Are you well, Silverwings?" he asked.

>I was still taking in the feel of his body "You came, you cameâ€| all of you is here. All, except for your scent."
"I gave myself a quick fire bath so my smell would not be offensiveâ€|" his voice trailed off.

>I pulled away. "The secret of your flight", I whispered.<p>

There it was, instantly intruding upon our happy meeting. The thing that could destroy our love.

>"Don't let it make me lose you. Don't let me lose you, Silverwings. Please accept me, once you have seenâ€|"
"Show me now", I said, my voice suddenly shrill with dread.

>Nervously he looked back at the large boulder. "I must go behind the boulder over there. When I return, I will have things on me, a flying harness which I need to fly. It takes a bit of time to put it on." Facing me again "Please, my love, remember it's me when I return. I'm wearing a harness, but it's me."

>He shot me a nervous glance, gave a little stroke to my head and disappeared behind the boulder.<p>

When he reappeared I shrieked and bolted away. At some distance I managed to check myself and forced my head to turn. I sawâ€| what did I see? It was incomprehensible. There were things around his chest, things were sitting on top of his forepaws. More things everywhere.

>"It's me, Silverwings, please. Will you not come to me? Look, my tail" and he curved it around his body.
The tailfin was complete! The other half was also there! But noâ€| it was brown, not black. Howâ€|?

>"Everything on me is needed to make the tailfin work. And it works, Silverwings, I have flown this way for fourteen winters now. Please come closer so you can see and smell."<p>

At seeing me still half turned away, ready to jump he said "Silverwings, this is how I have been able to find you, to fly all the way from my faraway home."

>His voice lessened my panic just so much that I could near him,

starting to sniff the air already from a distance. There it was, the strange tang I had smelled at the start of our mating last year, the offensive smell that had almost put me off.
"Love, give me a nose, it's me." I did, and with a sigh relaxed somewhat. I eyed and sniffed the nearest things; found them repulsive.

>"Will you not talk to me? Just say something?"
"Youâ€| youâ€| just fly now."

>"A shudder passed through him. He lowered his eyes and said, "There is one more thing I need. And this will be even more difficult for you than my flying harness. Butâ€| mind what I say: he is no danger to you. No danger."
"Heâ€| HE?"

>"My brother. My brother flies with me."
_What? Another dragonâ€|

>"My human brother."

>"WHAT? A HUMAN? YOU BRING A HUMAN HERE?"<p>

Aggression overrode the panic immediately. _A human! So close to the nest!_ In an instant I was ready to kill. My eyes narrowed to slits, I roared, ready to leap for the boulder. But I found Nighthawk blocking the way, wings spread wide also.

>"Check your fire! Please, calm down, calm down! I'm alive because of him. He saved me, made this harness and made me fly again. He saved me, hear me! Do not harm him. He is my brother. He is harmless, Silverwings, so small, you could push him over with a paw. Silverwings, look at me! If this is too much for you I will retreat and take him with me. But I cannot let you kill him. He has younglings, and provides for them, together with his mate. If he is killed, the younglings suffer. Younglings, Silverwings." His voice trembled.
_Younglings. _I retreated, snorting, snarling.

>"Silverwings, if you kill him, I will never fly again."
At that I deflated.

>"Then fly" I croaked.<p>

He went to the boulder and gave a soft call. A human appeared. Even from where I stood I saw the human tremble. I could not check my snarls and hissed at him. He briefly faced me, gave me a deep bow. Then he mounted Nighthawk, MOUNTED him! It was utterly offensive. My heart turned cold. Nighthawk leapt into the sky and flew away. Two times he swooped over my head. Then he gained height and started to perform a couple of manoeuvres. Maybe I should be glad with what I saw, but I wasn't. Now he climbed straight up, like only we Night Furies can do. So he could do that too! The higher he climbed, the less visible that offensive human was. That human ON TOP OF HIM. Unbearable! Then he came soaring down with the specific piercing sound of our kind and landed near to the boulder. The human got off, made a bow to me again and disappeared behind it.

Nighthawk watched until the human was hidden and walked over to me. Even before he was near I snapped at him "Does this human dominate you? He sits on top of you in a dominant position! And you let him!"

>"No, we are friends and equals. He saved my life, gave me his friendship and kept me alive for half of my life. He helps feed me. I can hunt for myself only part of what I need. I owe him my life, but he owes me too. I saved his life once as well. To me we are like brothers. So no, he does not dominate me, he has no hold over me."
Then he added "I will tell you everything about him, if you let me, Silverwings. From this moment on I will answer all your questions, and nothing of my life will be a secret to you

anymore."

I felt frustrated and drained. Backing away I said "I find this human offensive. It is all way over my head. I don't know about this, I don't know!"

At that I left him standing there and ran off.

3. The human

****Chapter 3. The human****

****A change of heart**

>I stopped in my tracks. Somehow it had felt better to run off instead of leaping into the sky. But suddenly it seemed impossible to take one more step away from Nighthawk, or some invisible link would snap.

>I just stood there, feeling drained. Where had the vision gone, the beautiful vision we shared last year?* Nothing had prepared me for this abnormality, this utterly disturbing scene. How right he had been that this could tear our love apart.<p>

Yet I stood rooted to the spot and could not bring myself to return to my children. Over and over the shocking scene repeated itself: the human mounting him, both of them jumping into the sky. He DID fly! Nothing he had said to me had been a lie. But he was tied, body and soul, to this human he called brother. There was no separating them. I could not have Nighthawk without that human. Or, why not? Couldn't he simply stay with me? I would hunt for two! No, I'm not thinking straight. If Nighthawk stays with me he wouldn't be able to fly. I cannot ask that of any dragon, it's like giving up life itself.

The wind sighed through the trees, caressing my hide. I looked around me: trees, moss, dangling flowers, a spider in its web. Slowly some sense of normality returned. Suddenly, almost unconsciously, I began moving off to the side, circling, while keeping downwind. With stealth I approached Nighthawk and the human from a different angle, moving like a shadow, like stalking prey.

There they stood: silently gazing in the direction where I had disappeared. Nighthawk quietly sat down, the human turned his head towards him. Nighthawk's head sunk ever lower. The human lowered himself to be level with him and stroked him with his little claw the way a dragon would do with the side of the head or with the tongue, clearly in an attempt to give comfort. _They are close to each other, it clearly shows_. The human took one of Nighthawks drooping earflaps and stroked it up. He moved around and lifted Nighthawks head in encouragement. It was then that I saw that the human also had an unnatural thing on him. The lower half of one hind leg was made of something strange. _Cripples, both of them_. Eventually they just leaned against one another, quite forlorn. There was no denying of the intimacy I witnessed between them. _That human knows Nighthawk inside out. __They have spent so many years together, he knows Nighthawk better than I do_. The human had allowed him to fly again and the flight I had seen them perform had been quite good actually.

Seeing them together like that somehow captivated me, I just couldn't leave anymore. My head was in turmoil. What about the vow I made to

myself last year: _'If I can do anything about it, you will never be alone anymore. I do not want you to ever feel lonely again.'_>He is not alone: he has his human. But if that had been enough, why had he been so desperate to meet again? Why would he take all the effort to come to me from lands far away? His human brother must have agreed to the search because without him Nighthawk cannot fly. And didn't he say the human had younglings himself? So back home is a mate who has to do all of the hunting by herself. And still he agreed to fly his dragon brother? That has to count for something. Indeed, the more I thought about it, the more I realised what a tremendous effort both Nighthawk and the human had made. But... a human. It's so... such a disgrace. Yet, look at them, together. The way the human tries to comfort him, the way he shares in Nighthawk's grief.

I realized a decision must be made now. There was no time to fully think about this. I cannot go back to my children with my mind in turmoil and say nothing; they will sense something is wrong. It will either be no, and then I will come up with some story, or I face them having accepted Nighthawk's brother. Only then the children will be able to meet their father confidently. And if they are going to meet him, it has to be tomorrow. The yearlings will be all exited and I cannot let them wait.

I became aware of something echoing in my memory, a fragment of a conversation: *â€|_I wonder about you, Silverwings. You are the most strong-willed female I have ever met. I wonder what life has in store for youâ€| what life has in store for you_â€|* Thundercloud's words.

>This?
I searched my heart. Yes, I still love Nighthawk. I do believe in our special bond since we so lovingly mated last year and in the beautiful vision we shared. And I will be true to my vow.

>Then I have to accept him. Him and his human brother. I somehow have to find a way to do this. If only I could be sure that this human does not control Nighthawk. How can I find out?
My heart knew, yet my brain needed time to adjust. With every passing heartbeat the path became clearer: I choose the path of love and will have faith. And I should not wait any longer, as Nighthawk looked heartbroken now.

Thank you, Thundercloud. Can you hear me? Thank you for your guidance. You gave me in abundance those gifts the Creator placed in you, bless your soul. I see my path before me now. I'm going to give the gifts placed in me to these two.

****My love and his brother****

>They stirred, readying themselves to fly away. NOW Silverwings, be strong.

>Quietly I stepped into the open and gave a soft call. Two heads jerked my way. The human quickly lowered himself to the ground, trying to give no offence. He can wait.

>I took a few steps. "Nighthawk?"
He ran my way, the harness softly jingling "â€|You came back!"

>"Iâ€|"
"You must be so upset. I am so sorry, so very-"

>"Yes, I am very upset, but-"
"I didn't know how to make this easy for you, it must have been so-"

>"Nighthawk, love, I accept", I said before he could finish.
He opened his mouth but could not bring out a word.

>"I do, my love."
"Youâ€| do? YOU DO!"

I placed my head against his. We both stood there, trembling.
>"Oh, Silverwings" he sighed "take all the time you need, you take it easy."
>"I cannot take it easy, Iâ€¦" I took a step back to look Nighthawk in the eye "â€¦Nighthawk, I have to tell the yearlings their father is here."
>He leapt up. "WHAT. YEARLINGS. Oh my love, is it true, really true? Do youâ€¦ doâ€¦"
>"WE have five. WE, Nighthawk. Three females and two males."
>" YEARLINGS, Silverwings. Yourâ€¦ our children."
>"Yes, darling, our children. Five little sweetlings."
>"Oh, I don't know what to say. Thank youâ€¦ it's marvellousâ€¦ simply wonderful."<p>

"Thank you for what?" I wondered.
>"For not keeping them away from me. It must seem to you that you take such a risk. But I can be trusted, my brother can be trusted.
>"Can he, Nighthawk, really?"
>"Yes my darling. He is gentle and caring. He greatly cares about hatchlings and would do nothing to harm them. He cares about them as much as his own children. Really. Only... there is one thing that might be difficult for you."<p>

"Please, no more difficulties", I groaned.
>"The thing is, he will want to touch the yearlings. Hold them."
>"What? Why? Can he not just look and nuzzle. And what is 'hold'?"
>"That is putting his hands, the little claws on his forepaws, around them and lift them to rest against his chest."
>"I shuddered. â€¦putting his hands around them. That's terrible."
>"Love, I have to explain. We dragons need to look and smell. A human needs to look and hold. They have a deep need to touch. Hands to a human are more than just forepaws. They examine with them, greet with them-"
>"Kill with them."
>"True. But my brother will not kill. He loves hatchlings, I have seen him hold hatchlings before. Just as he placed his hatchlings in my paws."
>"How is this possible?"
>"Oh, Silverwings, I have so much to tell you. But for now, will you believe that my brother is no threat to our children?"
>"I have no choice than to believe you. I must accept him, for your sake, and greet him. But, Nighthawk, I WILL dominate him. He is on my territory and much too close to my nest."
>"Love, I understand you feel the need to do that, but please be gentle with him. His body is not strong, you will learn where his strength lies, but it is not in his body. But allow me to be by his side. He still fears you."
>"He should! But you go now and be at the side ofâ€¦ your brother."
>"Brother. You said brother!"
>"You go."

As I saw him walk over to the human I shuddered again. Even though I had decided to walk the path of love, it didn't make things any easier. I somehow had to placate my killer instincts. _Picture him comforting Nighthawk, feeding him for I know not how long_. Also another thing Thundercloud had said came to mind: _'If you love me, then at least appreciate a bit the things my mates have brought me. I am who I am because of them.'_ He had said this concerning his love-mates throughout the years, when I was so very jealous. It means Nighthawk also is who he is, because of his brother. If I love Nighthawk, I need to have at least some appreciation for the human. _Keep that in mind, Silverwings, keep that in mind_.

****Meeting the human****

>When I reached the human, I pushed him over with astonishing ease. There was hardly any weight to him. Now he lay there with my claw over his throat. He had paled considerably, yet had not called on Nighthawk to defend him. It was between us. I gazed at him while conflicting emotions coursed through me. I had never been this close to a human. He was so small, so much thinner than the reindeer-humans I had seen that he looked more like small prey, and I had to make an effort not to close my talons and crush his neck. Yet he was not in terror, though I smelled fear. He just lay there submissively, his head turned to the side. I took his face in; it took a while before separate features pieced together in one face. His smell I recognized, it had been on Nighthawk last year, together with the tang of the harness before it quickly faded away.
Then the human turned his head to face me and looked me full in the eye. There was fear, but just beneath it, surfacing now... curiosity... appreciation... love? _Love? What..._ My paw hastily left his throat.

>"His strength is not in his body, Silverwings. He has loved you ever since he saw us together last year. That is why he has been so willing to help me search for you. That was not only because of me. He loves you too."
In astonishment I sank on my haunches. _Last year. Of course, wherever Nighthawk is, his brother has to be near. Of course. So he knows me already? Incredible_.

Yet I had to find out one last thing. Why had I pulled back my paw so quickly, after he looked at me. _This is important. Can his eyes make me do things, control me? Nighthawk may be convinced that he does not, but he could be under his influence already_.

>So, while the human started to rise, I looked once more directly into his eyes. Letting the restraint on my aggression slip somewhat, I growled and gave him a threatening glare. Then I slowly pushed him back to the ground once more, showing my fangs, ignoring Nighthawk's gasp next to me. Menacingly, I neared the human's head.
"Silverwings!"

>Ignore him.

>Now there was terror in the human's eyes and I clearly saw he could do nothing to stop me. That was enough. Just as I sensed Nighthawk's head come near to push me away, I retreated, satisfied.

"I had to know for myself, Nighthawk. I had to make sure he has no hold over me. No human will ever have a hold over me! I do not apologize for my action" I declared. After another ragged breath from Nighthawk I continued "Now I believe you, everything you told me about him. I accept him as your brother."

>"Oh" responded Nighthawk in a thin voice. Then, somewhat reproachfully "Could you not believe me on my word?"
"You could be under his influence" I shot back at him. "Put yourself in my place. I would not trust him with my life and that of the yearlings without being absolutely sure."

>"I guess you are right, I must accept that."<p>

Softening up, I asked "Can I do something to ease him?" The human hung against Nighthawk now, trembling. "I trust him now. I would like to greet him properly, but he has to recover."

>Still somewhat reproachfully Nighthawk said "Maybe be as non-threatening as you can?"
I have to speed things up, I need to get back to my children.

>Swallowing my pride, I stepped back a few paces and hung my head, softly crooning. When I looked up again, both Nighthawk and his brother were watching me. Then I gave a bow, seeing the human relax after that.
"Now, how do I greet him?" I asked.
>"Uhmâ€| weâ€| he extends his arm and hand. And you nuzzle it."
"Can you make him?"
>Nighthawk gave the human's arm a push, and then lifted it on his snout. He understood and the hand came my way. Without hesitation I put my nose against it. It was strangely soft and warm.
"I greet you, brother of Nighthawk." At that I blew a breath over the hand. I stepped back, looked him in the eye and said "My name is Silverwings."

His arm fell, then both hands rose and pressed to his chest. _Where his heart is_. Catching his breath, he addressed me "I greet youâ€| Lady. My name is Hiccup, friend of Toothless."
>To my amazement I understood bits of what he said, my ears perked up and my eyes flew wide open. I looked at Nighthawk questioningly.
"I will explain why you understand his speech later. Yes, the name of my brother is Hiccup, and Toothless is the name he gave me. Bit of a silly name, my retractable teeth you know, but I treasure it."
>Of course, he never has been able to tell him his true name.

>"I do not know the word he called you, but I liked the sound of it."<p>

I noticed we stood together stiffly, tense.
>A silly name, Nighthawk had said. Silly. We all had overcome so much; we sure could use something to brighten us up. I'll do something silly. I don't feel like it, but I'll just do it. Thundercloud, here I go! I took off yelling, ran in a circle, bumped into Nighthawk, nipped his ear and ran off again. That broke the spell and with a howl he chased me. Hearing the heavy thud of his paws behind me, I let myself being tackled. He cried out and instantly licked me all over.

Finally!

I giggled until something sharp pricked my hide. "Ah, that hurts." It was one of the things on him sticking out.
>"No, don't have it removed, I must go. Tomorrow we will meet again. You will find me at the foot of the hills over there. If you come when the sun is at the highest point, I will call out so you can find me easily. Good?"
"Good. Hiccup is, uhm, at my disposal for the time being."
>"Good. When you spot me, I want you to come fly in and land near to me. I will look for an open space so you can. That way our children can see their father land.<p>

"Our children" Nighthawk sighed. He looked at Hiccup and beckoned him over. He came, not looking so fearful anymore. I nuzzled Nighthawk and gave Hiccup a slight nudge. Then I stepped away and looked up at the sky.
>But when I glanced back at them over my shoulder for a moment, I sawâ€| two grins. Two stupid, identical grins.
So that is where that weird grin comes from. Brothers, indeed.

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The vision will be told in "Silverwings and Toothless -the prequel".

4. A father

****Chapter 4. A father****

****He's coming!****

>The sun had nearly reached its highest point. With difficulty I had made the yearlings retreat into the bush behind me. They were chirping busily, unable to contain themselves. To be honest, I could hardly contain myself. Their heads peeked out of the foliage and five pair of sparkling green eyes looked up to the sky expectantly.<p>

When I had returned yesterday, they had been downcast and scared, as I had never left them alone for such a long time. But my happiness was contagious, and before long they were bouncing around, yelling "Father is coming, father is coming." I had called them to me and said "Come, listen to my heart, all of you. I so love your father, my heart goes boom-ti-boom, so very fast." One after another they had placed their little heads against my chest, beaming, giggling. "And you smell so nice, mama, is that also because of father?" I hadn't noticed, but indeed: though it was nowhere near the full mating smell, as that could not be the case, my hide released a love-smell nonetheless. I should have been wiser, because now the children could hardly go to sleep. I had to use the nighty-night purr for hatchlings again to finally make them fall asleep.

Somewhere in the middle of the night I had to step outside of the cave. I had awoken from dreams in which hands grabbed my sweetlings, lifting them out of my sight. Upset and still not fully awake, I asked myself if humans have hidden talons that can shoot out, I forgot to ask. But the cool night wind quickly cleared my head and calmed me down. Nighthawk had told me so many times now that Hiccup could be trusted. I simply hadn't had the time to let things settle. As for Hiccup touching our yearlings: both Nighthawk and I are there at the moment our children greet him. We both can tear him away in an instant if he does anything threatening.

Realisation sank in that I had accepted a human into my life. How utterly unforeseen. I had never wanted to do that. Way back, Thundercloud had told me that people had become numerous both in the warm-lands and in the sunrise-lands. Over here there are only a few reindeer people that pass by as they follow the reindeer herds in their yearly feeding route. I could avoid them easily, and I did. I doubt they even know I am here. Yet Thundercloud had told me that humans ever more spread out into new territory. I suddenly asked myself if there would be any room left for us dragons? For animals? I had thought to be safe here, but now look at what happened. Is it our future that we dragons will have to consort with humans?

I remember the heated debate I had with Thundercloud about this. I had rejected the idea, for reason they are predators like us and predators don't mingle. Thundercloud had believed it possible, having in mind the people of the sunrise-lands that revere the local dragon. But I have no wish to be revered; I just want to be left alone. Yet between Nighthawk and Hiccup there was friendship. No reverence. And no control, I had established that! Friendship€| if there must be a

relationship between a dragon and a human, friendship is possibly the best. But deep down I am convinced that dragons do not want to be together with humans. We are proud creatures, keen on our independence.

Still, Hiccup had influenced me. The look, close to love, in his eyes had made my paw retreat from its death grip. _He does influence me, even if it is not on purpose. And how will this strange relationship influence our children? Yet, friendship and love are powerful forces to the good. I have to keep that in mind. _

Oh, I have so many questions for Nighthawk. How much time together do we have? Hiccup has to go back to his mate and younglings. Nighthawk implied that she had difficulty to provide for them on her own. I find this strange, as I am able to raise my children on my own, just like my mother before me. So it must be different with the humans. And Hiccup cannot travel back without Nighthawk. How uncanny is this relationship between the two cripples! How did they get crippled? I have so many questions.

Well, enough about this. I want to think about my lover! Oh, how he howled and licked me. I so much want to feel his body again! At some point that harness has to come off so we can freely romp. Memories of our play together a year ago went through my mind. Picturing that didn't do much good for going to sleep either.

In the morning, in order to prepare the children for the meeting, I had tried to explain to them the 'things' on their father, and about the human. But the yearlings had never seen a human, so it could not be explained. "Remember, however strange he looks, he is like a dragon, so pay him proper respect like I taught you" I told them. In order to explain the harness attached to Nighthawk, I placed twigs and leaves on their backs, adding "It's something like this." All yearlings found that mighty interesting, balancing the things on their backs, but the little males in particular. Tumble asked me "Can you make the leaf stick, mama?" So I wet the leaf and their little backs with saliva in order to make the leaf stick. They had insisted on carrying it into the meeting. Every now and then they nervously asked me "mammy, does the leaf still stick?", then hissed at their sisters who tried to knock them off.

****Meet your father****

>There! No need to call out: he had seen me. "Children, come out of hiding" I exclaimed "Look! Your father and his human brother."

>Immediately they called out to their father "Peep. Peep-peep. PEEP", falling back in hatchling-talk in their excitement. But when Nighthawk landed and Hiccup dismounted, they silenced and timidly huddled together against my paw.
I have to help them. "See, children? Here is your father. And his brother has to sit on top of him, which is how they fly together. But when they do not fly the brother steps off."

Over to Nighthawk I called "We have to do this at their pace, dear."

>Did he even hear me? He stared at his children in rapture, eyes opened wide.
Addressing my children again, I said "See? That is father. And that is his brother. That is how a human looks. See? A human stands on his hind legs. That is what humans do."

>Their eyes darted back and forth between the two, little earflaps

flattened against their heads. But now they relaxed a bit and started to sniff the air.<p>

Nighthawk in the meantime had started to beam, and so had Hiccup. The children found their voices again "Mammy?" "Father?" Now their little heads started bobbing up and down, and their ears perked up again. They became ever more curious and Heather was the first to take a step towards them. My little Heather, if ever there was a new 'Happywings' in the world, it must be her. If I let her, she just would pad over to her father.

"Let's all go over to father, shall we?" To my sons I whispered "The leaves still stick, just walk over carefully." "Oh." They had forgotten, but now they walked over evenly. "Father looks like you, mammy." "Yes, sweetie, we are all Night Furies." "But he has longer flaps." "Shhh, we will first greet each other, and then you look and ask everything you want."
>They had seen it right and it was easy to notice, as Nighthawk's earflaps all stood out wide in excitement. The long ones were similar to mine, but the two in between were longer.<p>

"My little ones, this is your father Nighthawk. Make a nice bow to him. Well done! And now you say your name and give him a nose." I gave Pinecone a soft nudge.
>"Pinecone", she said timidly.
"Hello Pinecone, my daughter. Give me a nose? Make me happy?"
>A smile even in his voice._
>That brightened my sweetie up and when Nighthawk's big head neared her, she bumped her little nose against his.

Now they were not so nervous anymore.
>"Heather", Heather said. Then she shouted "Father!" and quickly added a lick to the nose she gave.<p>

Fireweed astonished us all: "Hâ€|hellofathermynameisFireweed. _That's the proper line of greeting. _"You have been rehearsing this!" I said surprised "How nice is that for your father!"
>"Well done, Fireweed, my daughter. Give me a nose?" She did so in a dignified way.<p>

"Now look at your sons, Nighthawk. They both have a leaf on their backs because they already want to look like their father."

>"BOULDER" â€"he shouted, as he practically leapt up to bump into his father.
"Tumble, father."
>"Hello, my sons. So you also have something on your backs, just like me! Well, first go greet my brother, and then you return to check out my harness?"
"GREAT."
>"YES, father."<p>

****Meet Hiccup****

>Nighthawk went to sit down next to Hiccup and said "My children listen to me. This is Hiccup. Hiccup is a human and he is my friend. We are very close to each other, almost as close as Tumble and Boulder, brothers from the same nest. Hiccup is very kind, so don't be afraid of him."
I took over. "Children, make a bow? Now say hello andâ€| and flap your wings! He will like it that you flap your wings!"
>That was easy for them, they all did.<p>

Hiccup softly laughed and spoke words to them in a soft voice. He lowered his head and Heather was the first to give his face a quick nose. Now the others followed, except for Fireweed. She stayed where she was and took the human in. I felt for her.

>Now the dreaded moment came: Hiccup extended his hands to my sweetlings. My talons dug into the ground, and a soft groan escaped me. Nighthawk flashed me a look of reassurance and Hiccup stayed his hands. He looked at me and asked "May I touch them, Lady?"
I understood his question. My children all look back at me. Suddenly I found a solution and said "I believe Hiccup wants to touch you, my little ones. Shall we try? See what it is like? If you don't like it, you come to me." _There. Not bad at all. _And I nodded yes.
>"Don't be afraid" Nighthawk added "humans like to touch with their hands. Will you see if you like it?" His eyes signalled "smart of you" to me.<p>

They neared Hiccup's hands, smelled the fingers. Now he stroked the side of Boulder's head. "Like licks!" he shouted back at me. Heather also held her head out and giggled when he stroked her. Now they were all around his hands, only Fireweed kept back a bit. When Hiccup and my little ones got more bold, he also softly scratched their chins, chests, little shoulders. They giggled and laughed. Then he reached out to Heather. _Ooooooh, this is it._ Carefully and gently, he cradled his hands under her belly and lifted her up just a bit.

>"Peep?" she asked in surprise. But when he put her on the ground again, she wanted to be lifted again, this time shouting out in joy, flapping her little wings, "Wheee! Mammy, look. Look, mammy!"<p>

"Mammy, I fly" Boulder cried, once he was lifted up. _They are not afraid._ "Yes, I see! How wonderful!" I replied. Yet I kept a close watch on Hiccup. He gave me a look and nodded, he was aware of that. I was amazed to see how my children all spread their little wings as soon as they left the ground. The instinct is there, even when this young.

>Now they had all been lifted up, except for Fireweed. She wanted to be lifted too, but backed away as soon as the hands came her way.
It's not that she is afraid, but she wants to decide for herself.

>"Let them figure it out" Nighthawk whispered in my ear. He had come to sit next to me. "Have faith. Both in your daughter and in Hiccup. You are doing so well, my darling."
Hiccup placed his hands lightly on the ground and held them still. Now Fireweed came near, cautiously sniffed, looked up at Hiccup's face and then again at the hands. Then she hopped in herself, and was lifted by a smiling Hiccup, shouting "Mammy, father!"

>"We see you. Well done!" She will have things on her own terms. She will yet make her mark in life.

>I relaxed, sighed in relief and nudged Nighthawk. It had not been bad. Not bad at all.<p>

****Together****

>"My dear children, what about your father? Give me licks now? Tell me everything?" In a moment they were all over him. "Father, father", nuzzling him, licking him, bumping into him, telling all their important stuff at the same time. Purring, Nighthawk nudged them, said their names, licked them over and over. They also sniffed the harness, taking it in like anything else of their father. Of course, for them it is just a new thing to learn. They have no

prejudice against it. But when they put their sharp little teeth in parts of the harness, Nighthawk took up his position as a father and checked them. "My younglings, listen to me. You may nuzzle the harness and touch it, but you may not chew it or claw at it. The harness is very special to me."

>I helped them imprint this idea. "So what did father say you may do?" "Nuzzle and touch." "And what not?" "Not chew or claw." "Good! And I will have a sniff myself." I was still apprehensive about the harness, but could not stay behind.<p>

At this point Hiccup stepped in. "My Lady, look, I'll show you how it works." He mounted Nighthawk - still a difficult thing to watch - then his strange hind leg became as one with the things. "See, Lady, when I move my foot, it makes the fin change shape." _Foot._ I took the new words in as quickly as possible. Indeed the fin changed shape. Soon I understood that Hiccup needed part of the harness to move the fin, and part of it to be able to sit on Nighthawk. The children all stood on their hind legs, watching intently, their earflaps flattening every time there were clicking sounds.

>"Go over to my tail, you all, and look there" Nighthawk said.
Once there the children cheered every time the fin changed shape.

>I took the opportunity to imprint on them another word "It is special. Your father's harness is very special."
"Special, special" they cheered.

Hiccup dismounted again and Nighthawk invited the children to take a ride on his back. All eagerly ran up his tail to flatten themselves on his back. But by now they had become so over excited that, while their father slowly walked with an even step, one after another pooped and began to wail in embarrassment. To my astonishment, Hiccup quickly tore loose some moss. Making soft, soothing sounds, he hooked his hand behind Pinecone's little forepaws, raised her on her hind legs and cleaned her tummy. Stunned, the others forgot to wail. Once he had cleaned most off, he held the astonished yearling in front of Nighthawk's face, laughing "welcome to the blessings of fatherhood, Toothless, you clean her spotless".

>But Nighthawk didn't cringe a bit and readily licked his daughter clean. Hiccup hinted, poking at Nighthawk's forepaw "The little ones were SO excited to see you, SO happy." Nighthawk took the hint and after giving Pinecone a final lick he said "You're fine. Everything is fine. You were just SO happy to see me." After she had been lowered to the ground, she prodded his leg. "Father?" "Yes?" "SOO happy." "Yes, my sweetling. And now everything is fine, yes?" at which she nodded happily.
I took it all in, utterly amazed myself. _So Hiccup knows how to clean little ones? Oh, but he has younglings himself. How marvellous. _

Of course the others wanted the same treatment, so before long Nighthawk was thoroughly introduced to parenting. I chuckled, for once relieved from that chore. At hearing me chuckle, Hiccup started and said to me "Oh, excuse me, Lady, I didn't want toâ€¦|" But I gave a soft purr, and brushed his arm slightly. _Don't worry, Hiccup. You amaze me. _When I did the final cleaning of Nighthawk's back, I thought: _Indeed, Hiccup is gentle and caring._

Once all yearlings had been lowered in front of their father, they became drowsy, huddled together, yawned and fell asleep. As I sat down next to Nighthawk with my head close to his, I saw him looking down on the little ones between his paws with such tenderness. Again

and again he sniffed them, gave their bodies little licks. But, though they shifted a bit, nothing could wake them up anymore.

Hiccup lowered himself next to Nighthawk on the other side. At that, Nighthawk looked up at him and then at me, beaming! Then down to his children again. "I don't know what to sayâ€| you both and these sweetlingsâ€| I have no words."

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****Illustrations !******

>On Deviantart are three drawings of Hiccup carrying a little Night Fury, that I really like. You will find these drawings on my DeviantArt account. Browse:

>whiteaspen on** deviantart**; open** favourites** (hope you can still read this, after it's published. FF is hopeless with links.)

>For Hiccup + little Night Fury, see:

>- Hicderp by ~dinosaurbarbecue. In my story the yearling is slightly bigger, just slightly.

>- Baby Night Fury by ~TheTeaMaker. Very nice, though the little one is hilariously chubby. _

>_- Baby Toothless and Hiccup _by ~Timeless4Life. A rather large baby lying on Hiccup's shoulders. But it is grey, like in my story! This little dragon, in my opinion, would be a youngling of 2 years old. Yet also too chubby. My guess is that Night Fury younglings are slender, until they fill out as grown-ups.)

Enjoy.

5. Yet more surprises

****Dear readers, thank you so very much for your support !******

>**Ever more of you tag this story as a Favourite. Some even chose me as a Favourite Author!****

>**What a tremendous support, it really 'gives me wings'.
**

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****Chapter 5. Yet more surprises****

****The next day****

>Next day Nighthawk and Hiccup returned. In a moment the yearlings were all over them both. I had to warn the little ones, for as they jumped up Hiccup I saw him sway. He doesn't stand firm on that unnatural foot and I suspect my boisterous little ones can make him fall down. "Let's find Hiccup a nice boulder or log to sit on" I heard Nighthawk say next to me. I saw what 'sit on' for a human means when not much later I saw Hiccup sit comfortably on a fallen log. All yearlings sat down on their haunches next to him, looking very smug.<p>

"This is comfortable for him" Nighthawk told me. "When he kneels like you saw him do yesterday, or when he sits on his haunches like us, it eventually starts hurting. I saw him rub his stump yesterday evening."

>"Stump, you mean...?"
"He can remove the iron foot and the end of his natural flesh still sometimes troubles him."
>"Does your tail ever hurt? I had wanted you to ask you last year, but we had so little time for questions."
By the look in his eyes I realised it was still a delicate subject. So I quickly added "I still have so much to ask you. But let's talk during naps of the little ones, they should not hear everything."
>"Yes, let's do that. But to answer your question: no, my tail did not keep hurting like Hiccup's stump does, or sometimes does. But I miss my tailfin very much, it has been hard to be not whole, I cannot deny that. That is, until last year, you know, when you so lovingly... touched... when you accepted my tail. It eased my burden so much."
"I'm only glad I did. It opened up my heart for you even more... Nighthawk, during the first nap of the little ones, will you tell me how you lost your fin and how you became friends with Hiccup?"
>"It's one and the same story. I will tell you."<p>

****Father is a hero****

>"First something else, love. Your harness has to come off. I want to feel my lover again, like you were last year. We only had a few moments together yesterday."
"Do you have mating-feelings then?" Nighthawk asked surprised.
>"No, but I do have love-feelings."
"Me too! Off it goes, then. You and the little ones see how it's done. Oh, look at them!" They had grown tired of 'sitting' and came jumping our way.
>"But look, Heather lies on his lap now."
"Lap?" I asked puzzled.

>"That's not so much a part of his body, but the space on top of the legs, a comfortable place where their little ones like to be" Nighthawk explained.
"Well, Heather sure likes to be there!" She lay curled up on Hiccup's lap, with her head resting on his arm. It looked like she was purring.
>"How was it to sit like a human?" Nighthawk asked his other children. They chirped to their father all things on their minds and licked him.
"Listen, all of you. When I do not fly, I do not need the harness. So it can come off. Hiccup can do that now." And he gave Hiccup a signal.

Hiccup stood up and walked to us. Now I saw what "hold" really is, as he carried Heather in his arms, cradling her to his chest, but taking care that she could move the wing that was not pressed against his body. He did have difficulty carrying her, though. My yearlings are not that small anymore and the weight of Heather already was much for him. He must have strained himself yesterday, then, when he lifted all of them up. After having covered half the distance, he had to lower her. Heather did not jump our way, though, but walked next to him, keeping an eye on him.

Soon Hiccup was busy taking the harness off. The children were utterly amazed, and I hardly less. I also noticed how precisely a human can move his hands. Hiccup did very fine movements with them. Indeed, like Nighthawk had said, arms and hands are more than forepaws. Hiccup can grasp something specifically with one of his fingers opposing the four others. The grasping which we do with our teeth, he does with his hands, but far more nimbly. Every finger does a little bit of the work. Amazing.

One thing after another, the harness came off. But nothing was as strange to the little ones as when at last the unnatural tailfin came

off. It disturbed them to see Nighthawk's tail with half the fin missing. "Ooooh" they sighed and backed away in dismay. I noticed how that affected Nighthawk.

Hiccup too saw the reaction of the yearlings and told them "You father lost half of his tailfin, but he has been so brave. He is a hero. To the dragons that know him, he is a hero." The little ones did not understand all of it and looked up at me questioningly. I had understood the words, but did not understand why Hiccup had said that.

>Baffled I translated "...so they say your father is a hero." The children were quick in picking up the positive notion and approached Nighthawk's damaged tail again, cheering "A hero! Father is a HERO! What is a hero, mammy?" "That is a dragon that is very brave, and does very, very brave things." Now they cheered even louder.
I faced him and asked "Did you, my love? I find you brave, but how come-"

>"Well, hero is a bit much. Hiccup is the real hero, but I will tell you as soon as I can." Yet I saw the praise did him good.<p>

****Oh, the feel of his body****

>Cheering up ever more he asked "Children, will you watch over my harness? Keep all animals away? All rabbits and mice?" I chuckled, for immediately they formed a protective ring around it and started hissing.
"Now come, my love, they may call me a hero, but you are the queen of my heart" Nighthawk said, a light gleaming in his eyes.

>"You stay there, children, your father and I are going to share our love."
And off we ran. Oh, to feel him again, scales against scales. We bumped into one another, we pushed against one another, rolled over one another.

>I heard the children cheer. For a moment I watched what they were doing. They had forgotten about the harness of course, and were jumping up and down while screaming their excitement. "Mammy!" "Mammy!" Father!"
"You stay there, sweetlings, go back a bit. That's good!"

I went back to nipping Nighthawk everywhere. We looked into each others eyes. No more secrets, such a relief there. After some time our movements slowed. He stroked the top of my head with his chin.* He nuzzled and prodded me, which made love and tenderness flow through me. Chest to chest, our heads curved around each other tenderly. Stretched out wide, our wings met, meaning so much as they are flight and life. The sail's edges, sensitive to the currents of air in flight, being equally sensitive to the currents of emotion beneath the caress. Safe to steer byâ€|

>"My love" Nighthawk whispered "we're together again... my beauty... our love alive in the little ones... how I longed for this moment... I longed for you so much."
I couldn't find words and sighed, pressing myself against him.

Nighthawk whispered "You know I remember all the scales on your head? First you have three little ones, here, right above your eye" and he gave three little licks. "Then a bigger one here, a bit triangular. I always think about that one as my scale. Please, Silverwings, let that one be my scale." I giggled and gave him a lick. "And then here - lower your head dear - there are bigger ones together with little ones, like a path, up to your ear. No, keep your head low, so I can lick. Mmmm..."

A rustle in the grass made us look down. There were the little ones. They had not been able to stay where they were, and now shyly looked up at us. "Oh, come, you children. I love your mammy, my lovely Silverwings, and I was just telling her that I remember every scale on her head. When I was in my faraway home I always thought about Silverwings and the beautiful scales on her head. Mammy, lower your head so I can show them." The little ones started to giggle. "You see, all the scales make a path to mammy's ear? I was just licking the path, like so!" He did and I gave a muffled cry for he also licked my sensitive ear. The children cheered and cried "Me too! A lick? Me too!" He lowered his head and gave Tumble a lick, but he was still in the love-mood and licked so fiercely that it flipped him over on his back. "WHEE..." Tumble cried out and giggled on, little paws batting the air.

>"Ha ha, you stay upside down, I'll flip you all over." And before long all little ones lay paws up, laughing and giggling.<p>

"We'll lie down now and you come lie in between us. That is, first you all go in the bushes and poo, as you surely must need to" I said. When they came back we licked them clean. "Slow down" I whispered to Nighthawk who was still a bit wild "it's supposed to calm them now". When they had settled I said "Children, this love between your father and me has been the start of your lives. This is how you came to be." They didn't understand of course but they blinked at us curiously and happy. Then they became sleepy and soon dozed off.

"They need more naps." I whispered. "And yesterday night they were exhausted. So many new impressions in such a short time."

>"And how is it with their mother?"
"The same, to be honest. But I would not miss it, not miss you. I mean, look at us now! After a short silence I asked "Will you tell me now, you know, about you and Hiccup?"

>"Let's shift a bit then, so the little ones really cannot hear us. I'll curve my tail around them and shield them from the sun with my fin and you sit close to my head, so I can whisper and you can yet see them."
"You start to sound like a father."

>"I AM a father!" Oh, the pride and joy in those few words.
"Yes, you are, darling, you are."

****Nighthawk tells****

>"I'll tell you the main things, Silverwings. Once we have more time I will fill in the details. Yet you ask me whatever you want." He then started to tell me a very disturbing story in quick, half-whispered lines. About how there had been a war between two islands in the ocean. How a tyrant monster had enslaved dragons to bring her food. How these dragons raided the island of Hiccup's people for the sheep that she preferred above all other food. How the growing hatred over losses and injuries had made the raiding become ever more cruel, until it was no less than a war. How he himself had been ensnared by that cruel monster and had just started to raid when he was shot out of the sky. That it had been Hiccup who shot him down. And that in crashing through the trees one half of his tailfin had been ripped off.<p>

So Hiccup had maimed him! That shocked me so much that Nighthawk had to hush me and nuzzle my head to calm me down. I stared over to where Hiccup sat: seemingly an innocent, frail human, busy scratching on some flat thing with sort of a twig.

"Did you maim him in retaliation?" I asked hotly.

>"No. But not because it hadn't crossed my mind. I am like all dragons, Silverwings, including being vindictive. But from Hiccup I learned something important and that is that you have a choice. Not in whom you are, or what happens to you, but in what you do, in your actions. So rather soon I chose forgiveness, friendship and peace. It's those things that ended the war. The slaying of the tyrant was necessary, but forgiveness and friendship really brought on peace."
While I pondered those words, he continued "Believe me, love, what Hiccup did in shooting me down was normal in that war. We killed the humans, the humans killed us. The thing he did afterwards, when he found me and did NOT kill me, THAT was the shocking difference. And ever since he found out I could not fly anymore he has tried to remedy that. -Oh, we have to stop, the little ones are stirring. Just keep calm, love, everything between Hiccup and me worked out fine. We became friends. Just wait until I can speak with you again."

That day, whenever the little ones napped or played with Hiccup, Nighthawk quickly told me more. That he had such special feelings towards Hiccup, that maybe if they had met under different circumstances and Hiccup had not crippled him, he might have chosen Hiccup as his Rider. It had felt that way.

>"A RIDER, but Nighthawk, that only exists in the legends. How can this be now?" I exclaimed.
Nighthawk gave a shrug "I do not know for sure. It just feels that way. He is that close to me."

>"Things hung in the balance, then, when you introduced him to me. I would have killed him if you had not stopped me."
"There is no life without risk. That is what Hiccup's mate told him last year when she gave Hiccup permission to go on the search with me in rut. We would not have met otherwise."

>"What a risk she took! She greatly cares about you too, then."
"She does, as do their children."

>I... I can hardly believe humans care that much for a dragon."
"For dragons. Many more of his people have befriended dragons, and fly on them."

>"No, NO... that's just too... too... I can hardly believe that... But I have to believe you."<p>

****Sleepless again****

>Again I could hardly sleep. So Nighthawk was one of the dragons of the sunset-lands. Or, not lands, he lived on one of the islands in the ocean. The ocean Thundercloud had told me so much about. That I feared, that yet fascinated me so much. So Thundercloud had heard the truth when he was told dragons lived on islands in the ocean, but that a terror was there. So the terror of the tyrant monster had come to an end. And somehow Nighthawk and Hiccup had played such a part in it that they are called heroes since. Nighthawk had been a bit vague about that, I need to ask him to be more specific. Yet during the last stages of the fight with the monster, Hiccup had fallen off Nighthawk and he had mangled Hiccup's foot in his effort to save him. How utterly strange this all was. It had not been retaliation, Nighthawk had assured me of that, but in some strange way they had become even and depended on each other now. Though Hiccup would be able to survive without Nighthawk, as I understood his tribe supports him. But Nighthawk could not survive without Hiccup and the help of his tribe. Yet Hiccup stayed by his side and he and his mate even had taken huge risks for Nighthawk's wellbeing.<p>

Still, Hiccup had caused my love to lose his flight. They both may have come to terms with it, but I allowed the pain to wash through me

in the quiet of this night. In one hostile act Nighthawk had been reduced to a crippled state. He might be considered a hero on his island, but everywhere else he would be an outcast to his own kind, particularly in mating time. He wouldn't stand a chance against any other Night Fury male and no female would consider him twice. Other than me, that is. How had Nighthawk been able not to retaliate in hate? As the anger built in me, I hated Hiccup for what he had done.

How do I balance this? I need to as I don't want to upset Nighthawk and I don't want to drive a wedge between them. Or influence my children in a negative way. Yet the whole thing cooled the little bit of warmth I had begun to feel for Hiccup. All it did was confirm to me how dangerous it is to be around humans.

>Then again, there is more to humans than I had ever imagined, so much became clear to me. And it was not only Hiccup that rode a dragon. More of his people did, and for those dragons it wasn't even necessary as it is for Nighthawk. I was very uncomfortable with that. I even shuddered with disgust now, imagining a human climbing on my back.<p>

Oh, again I forgot to ask how long they will be able to stay! But it really does not matter how long, every amount of time would be too short. Why do I feel this way, I asked myself, wanting so much to be with Nighthawk? All dragonesses raise their children without their mate, don't they? And then, seven years later, they mate with another male and raise his children, together with the older ones. That is, if a male comes, as there are so few of us left.

>Oh, I so wish to mate with Nighthawk again. We only shared the last days of the whole mating period last year. The heat had worn off too rapidly.
I want us to be together so much.

Oh, don't be foolish, I chided myself, such things do not exist. Thundercloud had mentioned it only jokingly "And then there is mating for life. But that is only in the legends". It must be in my nature. I had been very attached to Thundercloud also, and had wept bitterly when I had to leave him to lay my eggs. And now I feel so much attached to Nighthawk. It must be something strange of me.

>Legends. It struck me: had not also the notion of a Rider been only in the legends? Yet Nighthawk had mentioned this very day that he felt like Hiccup is his Rider. So why not-

>Don't get foolish thoughts, you. Try to get some sleep.

****Yet more surprises****

>Next day they returned, burdened with something extra. A deer! What a feast! I had been worrying about food. Early today my hunt had not been successful, I had not been sharp enough after three? four? nights of hardly any sleep. Eventually I only managed to snatch some rabbits, that, once half digested, I regurgitated to feed the yearlings. But, it is hatchling food and they prefer the soft tissues of prey by far now.
So, this gift of food was more than welcome and before long we all dug in. Except for Hiccup who ate some kind of unknown food.

Licking my lips clean, I said "So you hunted this morning?"

>"No, not us, the other dragons from the search party did. It is a gift from them."
"OTHER DRAGONS?" I exclaimed. Immediately I realised _that_ was the strange flock of birds I had seen. That had

been dragons, seen from afar! Yet I sensed something fishy about this news, though I could not put a claw on it. Again there was disturbing information: other dragons were in my territory and yet I was obliged to thank them for their gift.

>"Why did you come accompanied by other dragons?" I asked somewhat suspiciously, adding reluctantly "I should thank them for their gift of meat, of course."
"As for the meat: they will not deplete your territory of prey, don't worry about that. They took care to hunt far away. As for them travelling with us: we travelled in a group to be safer. And they helped us search for you. There are seven of them, with seven humans that ride them."

>"HUMANS? There are also HUMANS near?" Now I was really upset. It is one thing to hear about dragons and humans riding them, but quite another that they are actually near. So there were seven dragons and seven humans near!

Angry, I snapped at them "You tell me everything now as I will have no more of this. I will hear every bit of surprise you planned on yet giving me! -Oh, look what it does to the children."

>At hearing my angry voice they had huddled together, timidly eying up at me.
"Oh, my sweetlings, you did not do anything wrong. I got upset. Mammy got upset by herself. It's a bit silly of mammy for there is nothing to worry about. Everything is fine and I will keep it that way." During the last words my eyes flashed a warning at Nighthawk. Then I lowered my head and nuzzled them. "There, there, shhhh, give mammy a lick, oh yes that is nice. You are my darlings, come lie against mammy's tummy. There, there. I'm going to tickle you! Here comes my paw!"

>By now they were giggling again and batted my talon away with their little paws.<p>

"I see we have been stupid. Sorry for that Silverwings. Let us know when you and the children are ready, because we have a message for you. It is the last thing, then there will be no more surprises."

>"It better is!" I snapped back. Softening up however, I said "But you can tell me now."
"Silverwings, it is a message Hiccup has to deliver."

>"Hiccup! Well, my sweetlings, shall we hear what Hiccup has to say to us? It is a message, I hear." I looked up at Hiccup coolly.<p>

oOoOoOoOo

Will you review (again)? It's such a pleasure.

*** exactly this moment is captured by Laryssa in her drawing "Toothless and Silverwings"*** that is the thumbnail picture of my story. She made this drawing a gift to me which made me very happy.

>If you want to see the original picture, browse:
whiteaspen on **deviantart**; open **favourites**.
See: Toothless and Silverwings by ~Laryssadesenhista.

There is also another sweet picture of **a yearling, timidly looking up**:

>Night Fury-Toothless Dragon by ~Starrypoke.

****Summary******

>****Silverwings has been able to accept the fact that her lover Nighthawk has a close bond with a human. However, the fact that a human came into her life puts her world upside-down completely. She learns from her children though, they readily accept everything about their father and his 'human brother' as they are not yet prejudiced. Both Nighthawk and Hiccup are delighted with the yearlings and they in turn have the time of their lives with their father and his friend.****

****For Silverwings however, the appreciation she has begun to feel for Hiccup disappears completely when Nighthawk reveals that Hiccup was the one that maimed him and made him lose his flight. She keeps that hidden from Nighthawk. But it will not be long before Hiccup, with his uncanny understanding of dragons, senses the renewed hostility of this terrifying dragoness. ****

****Just moments ago it is revealed to her that there are even more dragons and humans near of an accompanying search party, which upsets her tremendously. She demands that they tell her everything now. Nighthawk tells her there's one more thing: Hiccup has a message for her. ****

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****Chapter 6. Hiccup****

****The message****

>"Lady, I have a message for you" Hiccup said. "I will speak to you with due respect". With that he lowered himself on one knee.
That started me. "Nighthawk, he must not pain himself. I can see this posture is uncomfortable."

>"My dear, the message is formal and very important. He will address you in a way the humans show the highest respect."
The highest respect? "Children, then we stand up. Come stand in front of me and listen carefully."

"My Lady, first of all I want you to know how much the dragons and the people of my village like Toothless and care for him. In our village he is held in high esteem. When he returned last year, everybody was so happy for him that he had found a mate. On our island we never saw another Night Fury in all these years. It was clear to everyone just how happy you had made him. So everyone wants to meet you!

>Therefore, Lady, on behalf of the dragons of our village, on behalf of the humans of our village and of on behalf of the chief of our village, my father, I herewith invite you to come and pay us a visit. If you agree, we will escort you to our island, which is called Berk. Later, we will escort you back to the Mainland at any time you wish, if only before the storms of autumn. Will you please consider it? The village would be honoured if you came."
He paused for a moment and concluded less formally with "We would so very much like that."

Baffled, I did not know what to say to this. But the children did. "Yes mammy, oh yes, yes! Please, pleeeeeease?" Still stunned, I looked Nighthawk in the eye. There was such a fragile look there. _This is important to him, very important._

>"I... but how... the children cannot...?" I stuttered.
"We have

thought about that. Each dragon can take one of the yearlings on its back in a basket. A kind of little nest, it will be safe."

At once I understood this had been their plan all along. They cunningly had worked towards it. I felt a bit tricked. But I had to admit, they had worked towards it as gently as possible, taking little steps at a time.

>Again I gazed at Nighthawk. I must not make him suffer by delaying my decision, he has suffered enough in life. So I said to him "It scares me very much, the whole idea. And it MUST be safe for the children... but I... we will go with you."

****So you will travel in a basket****

>Hiccup shouted. The yearlings peeped. I went over to Nighthawk and leaned against him for support. "Now I need your help, this is too much. Help me, Nighthawk."
"I will, Silverwings, for sure. Oh, thank you so much, my darling. You make me so happy right now, you know that?"

>Yes, I know.

>"You really take it easy now. The other dragons can hunt for you, if you let them, and they will protect you and the children. They will want to do all the work so you have all the time to adjust. Oh, they will be so relieved. But not half as much as I am."<p>

Pulling myself together, I said "You know, Nighthawk, in a way I am relieved too. I have been worrying about how much time together we would have. In this way we will be together longer. But now I am worried about our children. I do not understand, how will they travel with us?"

>"In a basket! But let Hiccup explain that. I guess you will have to see. I will have to see too. We dragons sometimes carry things in a basket, but Hiccup is the one who thinks things out. He thought about how my harness must be and then made it. He gets ideas and then makes them in the smithy."
"Smithy?"

>"You will see what a smithy is. Yes, YES!" Nighthawk cried elated. "You will see EVERYTHING for yourself, as you will see the entire village. You'll see Astrid and Hiccup's children. You will see his father->"
"Did Hiccup say his father is the chief of the village?" I interrupted.

>"That's right. His father is the chief."
But then Hiccup must be... have a lot of status? What is all this? You both are called heroes, you yourself are held in high esteem, Hiccup is the son of a chief. Dragons care so much that they help you?"

"It is true, Silverwings. And it may sound like quite something, but Hiccup once was almost an outcast. You must have noticed how frail he is. You will yet see how burly his people are in general. When he was a youngling, everyone looked down on him, despite his status. His father was unhappy with his offspring. Part of Hiccup's soul was dying when we met. In truth I was his first friend. He sought my friendship because he craved it. So much, that he even looked through all the outward terror that a Night Fury brings and picked up on my inner miseries.

>And I somehow sensed his cry for help. I was not in a much better state. I was shunned by my own kind, partly because I kept aloof. But the other dragons were also afraid of me. Dragons in my region are... were... afraid of Night Furies as a species, though we are not the largest dragons by far. Thing is, our fire is the deadliest, as it can even pierce dragon scales. And in fight we are nearly invincible. So I was in not much better state then Hiccup when we met. I also

just had found out I had lost my flight, so I... we... So, yes, we may be seen as heroes now, but we both will never forget how things were. We still are a bit suspicious about too much praise. More important to me than all the status is that you grace me with your love, Silverwings. And I wouldn't mind if for the rest I would be just any dragon."<p>

"That's a lot you tell me now, darling. A lot..." I sighed.

"Mammy!" Boulder prodded my leg impatiently.

>"Yes sweetie. Oh, of course, we talked so long, your father and I, didn't we? So long. And we have Very Important Things ahead of us, don't we? We are going to see where father lives. Come to us, all of you."
"What is a basket?" "Where do you live, father?" Now the children were asking away.

>"Did you hear there are other dragons not far away?" Nighthawk asked back. "What do you think, are we going to meet the other dragons?"
Now the little ones were not so sure anymore.

>"These dragons are my friends" Nighthawk told them. "And each dragon has a human friend, just like me and Hiccup. That's how it is where I live. You will see for yourselves. Because we will travel, children. We will go in the direction of the setting sun. On my island, you can see the sun go down in the ocean."
"What's an ocean, father?"

>"That is water, lots and lots of water."
"Like a puddle? We have puddles here, after rain."

>"Dear, have they even seen a lake yet?"
"No, only a glimpse of the river nearby."

>"You will see, little ones. The water is so wide and so deep you can dive in it and swim around. And hunt for fish. You go practice that now: you spot a fish and use your wings to swim and catch it."
In no time the children were engrossed in hunting down imaginary fish, flapping their wings. That gave Nighthawk the opportunity to face me again.

****I got my adventure****

>"I will tell you now why you can understand Hiccup" he said. He explained that Dragonese is a language close to the root of all languages, so somehow we get the general meaning of what is said in any other language. How totally amazing this is!
"I have tried to teach Hiccup Dragonese but he doesn't pick up the thoughts, only the supporting vocalization, what he calls the 'grunts' and 'growls'. Yet he is aware that there is more. But I speak to him through body language in combination with vocalization. That already is quite clear to him. But if he really needs to find out what I mean he asks questions and I nod 'yes' or shake 'no'. And he is smart, often he asks the right questions. He has a keen understanding of humans and dragons alike, of their beings and motives. You will yet find out."

After some hesitation he continued "Silverwings, are you cross with us? We really didn't know..."

>"Yes and no. I am cross with Hiccup, for making you lose your flight..." Cross? Hah! At this moment I would mow him down if it was only him and me. "...and for the strangeness he brings. Humans bring strangeness. Humans and dragons together... I don't know. Are all these humans 'Rider' to the dragon they fly on?"

>"They are friends, but no dragon shares a bond as deep as Hiccup and me. So the answer to that is no, I guess."
"Seven dragons, that is

a LOT of dragons. I have never seen so many dragons at one time. How will I even speak to them all?"

Suddenly I realized something. "I must tell you something, Nighthawk. It in fact excites me to go in the sunset direction and see the ocean. You know, in a way my desire to see the ocean is why we met."

>"How so?" he asked amazed.
And I told him how I had wanted to go on an adventure and see the ocean, that Thundercloud had talked to me about, for myself. That I had used the restlessness of the oncoming mating period to muster the courage and fly in the sunset-direction. But that once I saw the mountain range that separates the taiga from the ocean, I had not dared to cross that.

>"That is why I got stuck where you found me. My mating period had come, and I readied a mating ground there. But if I had not wanted to see the ocean, I would not have been there."
"So you were on an adventure!" Nighthawk cried out. "You surely got more adventure than you wished for."

>At that we had a good laugh together. It made the yearlings gather around us again and look up at us curiously.<p>

****There's a first for everything****

>Hiccup approached us too, smiling. While we were talking he had been studying the sky and he clearly had something on his mind. He was relieved and happy, yet wary. I noticed how he kept Nighthawk in between him and me. Just as well he doesn't seem to read MY body language. Then he would notice my anger towards him and then he would not be wary, but scared! However, I'll keep the peace for Nighthawk's sake._

>"I have a proposal now that the weather is so fine" Hiccup said. "Uhm, Lady, you tell me what you think about it. What Toothless and I can do is to give your yearlings their first flying experience. We can gently fly up while I hold one yearling. We could fly low, in a circle, and then land again.

>While the little ones danced and shouted, Nighthawk and I looked at each other.
"Hiccup never ceases to amaze me" he said "I would have never thought of that: it is possible and not dangerous."

>"Children, first I will see how Hiccup holds you, and you must be able to sit still and not jump or anything." I cautiously told my excited children.<p>

So the harness had to be put on again. Now we all saw how that was done. Before long Tumble sat down on the saddle before Hiccup. Hiccup had one arm around him and with the other held the iron grip. First they walked and ran. After I had run alongside and established that Tumble was sufficiently secured, they took off in the air. Oh, to hear the jubilant cries of my little Tumble!

>Once up in the air, Hiccup held him with two hands, so Tumble had the freedom to flap his wings too. What a sight: Nighthawk flying in circles with the precious burden on his back. I shook myself free of all anxiety and cheered along with the others.
"Now let Hiccup hold you again, Tumble!" I heard Nighthawk cry, "we are going to land, hold yourself still." With hardly any wind Nighthawk could steer well enough so they made a soft landing.

>"Mammy, mammy, I flied!" Tumble cried when he was lowered to the ground. He practically jumped at me and licked my snout all over.
"Yes, my son, I am so proud of you. You were amazing. ...You go now, Boulder. That is, have you pooped already? No? Fireweed? You go then." The little ones were so excited, they couldn't stop

chattering.

When some time later they napped in front of me, I saw Nighthawk take off once more with Hiccup and fly around in circles. Why would they do that? Once down Nighthawk came running my way all exited.

>"Hiccup says I can try and fly on my own. On my own, Silverwings! Oh, I have to keep my voice down. We just flew while he did nothing. He tied my tailfin in a fixed position and in that position I took off, flew and landed. I could do that again, Silverwings, but without him on my back! It's because there is no wind and there is a lot of updraft here due to the summer heat on this flat land. It's never like this on our windy island and it's not flat. That is why we never thought about it. I will try now. Oh, Silverwings!"<p>

I stood up in excitement. There he flew, alone! He gradually gained height like he had done with the yearlings. When he swooped over, he yelled and laughed. It made the yearlings stir, but they were too deep asleep to wake up. Hiccup also yelled. I looked at him and my cheerful mood suddenly left me. _You may be shouting out in joy, Hiccup, but Nighthawk has not flown alone in a long time because of your evil action! _Anger surged through me and as if Hiccup felt it he turned to me and, startled by the look in my eyes, stumbled back a couple of paces. _Serves you right, you useless human!_But I quickly sobered up. _What are you doing, Silverwings? This is a time of happiness and you get ever more cranky. This is not good. You should focus on Nighthawk, it is his moment._

>As soon as I did that I felt much better. Nighthawk gradually lost height and landed reasonably graceful near to me. In one jump I was with him, wings wide.
"You did wonderful, how was it?" I asked.

>"Easy!" and he gave my face a wild lick. "But why does Hiccup just stand there?" and off he was to Hiccup, knocked him over and licked his face.
Moments later he was with me again. "Huh, huh, huh" he laughed "Hiccup is a bit shaky. Why is he so nervous? He shouldn't worry so much. But Silverwings, jump in the air with me. Let's fly together! It will be nothing like a mating flight, but still... Come, my love".

"I would like to, I really do, but I do not dare to leave the children alone."

>"Alone? But Hiccup is near."
"Hiccup!" I snorted with disdain.

>At seeing Nighthawk observe me I quickly added "I mean, Hiccup can hardly defend them, he doesn't have the strength to fight predators off."
"But there aren't any, I scanned around all the time up in the air."

>But then my old fear overrode my disdain and I started to fidget and tremble.
Nighthawk noticed and asked "Love, what is the matter?"

>"Oh, I am so sorry to spoil your moment, I really am. I wish I had the courage to leave the children. I know no predator is around. But... but..." I hung my head.<p>

****Being cared for****

>"Silverwings, come, lie down here with me. Tell me what is wrong."
Then I told him of the disastrous loss of my first clutch of eggs. That I had insufficiently scanned the surroundings and a bear had marauded the nest. Between sobs I managed to say "I have never been able to tell anyone. I know I am over protective... I know

I shouldn't be, but..."

>"Oh, my darling, my love... hush... shhh... So you too are scarred by life, though your scars do not show like mine. I never knew this. Oh, I realize I need to know so much more about YOUR life too. You have to tell me, my love. So there is much more to my 'Happywings' than meets the eye. Yet you seemed so joyful last year."
"I was, I am, because of you" I said, still sobbing.

>"Come, come close. I have to take better care of you."
He looked up at Hiccup and signalled him to come.

>"Hmm, Hiccup does not want to come over. Strange. Maybe he wants to leave us alone. But you relax, don't worry, there, there..."<p>

_ * ...I am out hunting. But prey seems to be far off. What I search is not here... I have to travel again... go away and leave this place. Somewhere far away I will find... find...__

>_My children cry... I must hunt... find them something to eat...*_

>_*Silverwings!*_

>"Mmmh?"

>_*Silverwings, wake up!*_

>I woke up with a start, stood on my feet at once and growled around viciously. Quickly I took the situation in: my children cried upset, Nighthawk looked at me worried and Hiccup stood nervously at some distance.

>"You were so fast asleep, I could hardly wake you up." Nighthawk said. "Since they woke up, the little ones have not wanted to play but just lay by your side. But when you slept so long they began to fuss and whine. Then I tried to wake you up."
Still groggy from sleep I lowered my head and shushed and licked the children. "Oh, mammy slept so long and so deep. Oh, my sweetlings, hush now." They calmed down but stayed subdued.

I looked up and saw it was early evening already. As soon my head cleared somewhat I explained to Nighthawk that I had hardly slept for days.

>"This is not good. You really should not be alone tonight, Silverwings. You will take a good night's sleep while I watch over you and the children."
Soon it was agreed that they would quickly grab Hiccup's things from the other camp and return before dark. I would give up the secret of the nest, as it would be abandoned within days anyway.

>I insisted that I would meet the other dragons the next day. Delaying the meeting would bring no relief, so better to move on.
When it grew dark, we all walked over to the nest site. Before long we lay safely in the cave, while Nighthawk sat in the opening with Hiccup lying next to him, just outside.

Again I woke up in the middle of the night, but when I opened my eyes I saw the silhouette of Nighthawk outlined against the near-dark of a summer's night. He sensed I was awake and his head neared me. He nuzzled me and breathed over me. "Thank you" I whispered, closing my eyes again. I felt so... cared for. I hadn't felt this safe and happy since... since I was a youngling and my mother watched over me and my brothers before she disappeared. My mother...

_Mammy... _

I quickly drifted off again.

When I woke up next morning I felt so refreshed and happy. Wonderful,

to wake up with your lover near.

>"Did you sleep well?" he asked.
"I slept well, thanks to you. I feel good again."

>Now the yearlings also woke up and were instantly jubilant to find their father near. And of course they found Hiccup and curiously watched the way he was bundled up with something wrapped around him. The wrap turned out to be perfectly fine for playing peek-a-boo. Of course they were a bit too old for that, but this was something else than a tailfin before their mother's face. Yet I noticed that he did not touch them and eventually quietly turned away. Now the yearlings babbled with their father while he washed them, one after another, with long stokes of his tongue. Then I quickly went over to the bushes with them to poo, as washing stimulates that.<p>

****Hiccup speaks with me****

>We settled on the meadow in front of the cave. Once more Nighthawk and Hiccup visited the other party to collect a prey, that is, if the others had been successful in hunting. They had indeed, so we all could eat. Hiccup again ate a different kind of food.
"What is it that he eats?" I asked Nighthawk.

>"It is called bread and it's made from the seeds of some sort of grass. The humans make it grow in rows, and then collect the seeds. They call that harvesting. You will be able to see it yourself, as I guess it is harvest-time once you are on our island. We dragons play a part in that, that is, the younglings. All younglings that had their 'first fire' this year have a wild time burning the stubbles to ashes and ploughing the ash into the dirt, while their parents cheer from the sides of the fields. It's sort of a festival. I must say, we learned from the humans to make fun out of competitiveness."<p>

Dragons having a festival, having fun... I liked the idea! I thought we dragons only briefly met, if not were outright competitive. That is, apart from mating time, which is also a time of socializing. Like my time with Thundercloud, but that was only with one male.

>It made me curious about the dragons I was going to meet today. At sun-high they would come flying in, one by one, so there was time for a brief introduction and some time for me to digest the first impressions. After that, when all had assembled, we would greet formally.<p>

Not much later, when Nighthawk had fallen asleep and also the little ones took a nap, Hiccup walked over to me, his body all tense.

Nervously he addressed me "Lady? We have to speak. That is, I would like to speak with you. Will you let me?" and he went on one knee again.

>What is it you want, Hiccup? I have no wish to speak with you. But you should not be on one knee again, once is enough. You go sit on the _log___. I walked towards the log and signalled him to follow me. He sat down and I sat in front of him, ears flattened and tail swishing in irritation.

>"Uhm, Lady, has Toothless explained to you how we talk? He always seems to understand what I say, and I have learned a lot about his ways. But when we have to find things out I ask and he nods 'yes' or shakes 'no'. Can we try?"
I nodded.

>"So you know! And you will? Thank you."<p>

"Lady, it must be so hard for you that Toothless is connected to me. My guess is that you by far prefer that he would have been on his own with no human involved. May I ask if my guess is right?"

>I looked over to the sleeping form of Nighthawk. Will I tell Hiccup the truth? Maybe it is good to have no false pretences. So I nodded.

>"I guessed as much and I am glad you are being honest about it. You are not like the dragons of our village who are accustomed to us humans, or even are friends to us. Lady, I can do nothing about how you feel about me, but please believe me that I have come to love Toothless like he is my brother. I hope this comparison does not offend you. Does it offend you?"
A nod... then I shook my head.

>"It not so much offends you, but... you are uncomfortable with it?"
Definitely. I nodded.

>"Is it only me, or is it humans in general?"
_How can I answer this?__

>"Oh, you cannot answer this. Are you uncomfortable with humans in general?"

>A nod.
"Have you been hurt or harmed in any way by humans?"

>I shook my head.
"Yet..."

>In my mind I went over all things I disliked about humans and I must have slightly shrank back...
"Your posture speaks clearly, Lady, you wish to keep away from humans. I am so sorry then, that you have to deal with this. And it is so brave of you that you do."

"Therefore I wish to thank you, Lady. Thank you so very much that you have not forced Toothless to make a choice between us. My guess is he would have chosen you, but it would have torn him in two..." and in a shaky voice he continued "...and me too."

>Again I looked at Nighthawk, slumbering in peace. And I nodded.

You are right.

>I turned my head, looked Hiccup full in the eye and read what was there. He still fears me, fears my power and my judgement.

But underneath that there was no guile, nothing hidden. My ears rose somewhat, I nodded and stirred to move away.

"Lady, please? There's more on my mind."

>What more? Instantly I got irritated again.

>As I sat again he said "Toothless must have told you by now that I did a terrible thing to him?"
I nodded, eyes narrowing, ears again flattened against my head.

>He took a ragged breath and continued "That I shot him out of the air and made him lose his tailfin."
My lips parted in a snarl, but a silent one, so as not to wake Nighthawk. Hiccup gulped and broke a sweat. Yet he continued "I am so very sorry about that. So very sorry, Lady. If there was a way to undo it, I would, but there is not. Always I am trying to find a way for him to fly on his own again, but until now I have not succeeded. Toothless had been able to forgive me soon after it happened. He and I have had peace about it for a long time now. But for you it must be terrible to know this and see us being together."

I turned my head away. How right he was. Yes, I hated Hiccup for this, but could not express it because of Nighthawk. Yet, if he had come to terms with it, I also must find a way to do that. Maybe I have to think about it differently. Not hate Hiccup, but hate the deed he had done. Hiccup is much more than this evil deed, so much I have to admit.

>"Lady, I fear you" he spoke to the back of my head. "I'm afraid that if I do something offensive in your eyes, or do some foolish thing with your children, you may lose your patience with me and strike me

down. I hardly dare to move anymore, I grow ever more tense. It's like you barely tolerate me and it seems to grow worse. It was more relaxed at first, but you changed... maybe after Toothless spoke with you about what I did to him?
I thought about it and nodded.
>"I am sorry about that, Lady, I really am."<p>

I sighed, loosening up somewhat. I turned my head back and gave Hiccup's hand a slight nudge. _I will have to live with you, for the sake of Nighthawk. And I am grateful for all your care for him. But I am not half as forgiving as he is. This deed was evil and stays evil. It taints you in my eyes._
>"Thank you for... touching me. We do not have to become friends, it just would be nice to not be afraid of you anymore. Is it... maybe... could you give me a sign when I do something wrong? So that not more anger builds in you? I once asked Toothless the same thing and he agreed. We worked things out that way. It really helped us both to get a clear understanding of one another. Will you do this too?
>That could be a solution. I do get irritated by things he does, although the most upsetting thing is simply that _he is ther__e. But now I keep everything to myself because I do not want to upset Nighthawk. And it relieves me that he says that we do not necessarily have to become friends. That way I do not have to pretend feelings I don't have. A sign... A good idea. _So I nodded.
>"Oh, what a relief. Can you think of a sign?
I thought for a moment, then showed my fangs aggressively, earflaps flattened to my head. Hiccup nearly tumbled off the log backwards. "It's a clear sign Lady" he stammered "to all, even to your dragonets.
>Indeed, it's too obvious. After a bit more thought I found something else and gave a tiny flick with my wings. That would go unnoticed by everyone else.
>Hiccup nodded. "You give me that sign and I stop with what I am doing then. Or, if I do not understand, I will speak with you as soon as possible."<p>

I saw him relax and heave a big sigh of relief.
>"There must be possibilities for you and Toothless to live by yourselves without me, in a quiet environment, like here. We have to think about that. It must be possible somehow. The only thing is that he will not be able to fly then. But you can hunt for him?"
I was a bit surprised that he had thought about it and nodded a clear yes.

>"Thank you for speaking with me, Lady. You have been honest with me, I much appreciate that. Now I am not afraid of you anymore, with the sign and all. And the way you feel about things, it's... only fair you do so" he concluded.<p>

He started to rise, but suddenly my paw kept him seated. It surprised both him and me. I looked to the side while thinking: _What is this?... It's just, I must not let him go like this. There should be something more. _I took my time pondering, then suddenly I found it. The speech had done me good, I felt less tense, less hostile. Hiccup really tries and does not pretend things. Maybe if I... Nighthawk told me that you have a choice in your actions, so what if I did something... friendly?

>I looked Hiccup in the eye with these new thoughts going on in my head. He noticed the change and some colour came back to his cheeks. I then craned my neck to bring my head close. Surprised, he raised a hand a bit, but at that I withdrew. Then neared him again. Again the hand. No, give me a nose. And I softly huffed and crinkled my

nose. Now he understood. He closed his eyes and moved his head my way. _You're brave, little human. One bite... But no. Peace. I too learn things. I see there is so much more to learn.__
>And our noses touched.

****One more thing about Hiccup****

>I quickly turned around and went to see my children. Maybe they sensed me, as immediately they began to stir. But something else caught my eye: they had curled up against their father and Nighthawk lay there just so very relaxed. He was fast asleep, yet a smile lingered on his lips. The sight filled me with tenderness, as I had not yet seen him asleep this year. And in a way he had changed. Last year when he was wrapped in the vision, he had also lain very relaxed, but something so vulnerable about him had pierced my heart. Now his body spoke of a deep peace. The children had to call me and prod me before I could tear my eyes away from my love.<p>

The rest of the morning we prepared for the oncoming meeting with the dragons and their riders. Nighthawk told me about some of them. "One of the humans is Fishlegs, Hiccup's closest friend, that is, of his own age. He is also very attached to an elderly human, Gobber. Gobber is of a generation that find it difficult to befriend dragons. His generation has made full war on us and find it difficult to get really close, although most of them tolerate us. Gobber however is able to more than tolerate us. They suffered greatly and some lost their relatives or friends. ...You must know one thing, love... I'm sorry to say, but at one point you must know... Hiccup's mother was killed by a dragon when he was only a youngling."

Shocked to the core, I tensed up.

>"Is it that shocking to you?" Nighthawk asked surprised.
Oh Hiccup, you have every right to hate us dragons and you DON'T.

"Yes... no... it is, I misjudged him, I really have."

>"Why do you say that? But don't be hard on yourself, there has been a lot of misjudging going on. Even up to this day dragons and humans have to learn about each other."
"No, no... I condemned him for what he did to you..." and I told Nighthawk what had passed.

"Love, I'm glad you told me. And now listen: Hiccup and I had plenty of time to come to terms with it. You only had one day. From now on, please don't keep such things away from me. And I have to understand that you don't necessarily share my deep bond with Hiccup. But you're honest, and you try, that's a good thing. Come here, give me a nose."

>I did and felt much better. Yet I realised it was a dreadful thing that Hiccup and I share: we both lost our mothers when we were young. And my heart warmed in sympathy.<p>

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To be continued...

7. The assembly

****A/N****

>Thank you, Ellie, gjco, Laryssa Gabriella and schoolgirl,for your quick reviews. It makes me SO happy you enjoy my writing. Dear** schoolgirl, **thank you for your correction, it is done.

****Summary**

>Silverwings has been able to accept the fact that her lover Nighthawk has a close bond with a human. However, the fact that a human came into her life puts her world upside-down. She gets even more upset when she is told more dragons and people are around of an accompanying search party. Hiccup then extends a formal invitation to Silverwings for her and the yearlings to visit faraway Berk. This is made possible because the yearlings will be carried in baskets.

****She agrees to that, mostly to please Nighthawk but also because it allows her to spend more time with him. But it means she again has to adapt to an ever widening perspective on a whole different way of life.****

>Hiccup tries to lighten the mood and initiates the first flying experience of the yearlings on their father's back. After that he encourages Nighthawk to fly alone for the first time. Nighthawk finds out how exhausted Silverwings is, and watches over her that night.

****The next morning, after breakfast, Hiccup picks up the courage to confront Silverwings as he sensed her renewed hostility. Thanks to his tact and subtlety they come to an understanding. Not much later Silverwings discovers the extent of Hiccup's gentle and forgiving nature, when Nighthawk tells her Hiccup's mother was killed by a dragon. This makes her realize that she misjudged him severely and makes her ashamed of herself.****

>The rest of the morning is spent in preparation for meeting the with the other seven dragons plus seven people, which is a crowd to Silverwings.

****In the next chapter they are on their way to Berk. Bear with me, readers. ****

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****Chapter 7. The assembly ****

****The arrival of the search party****

>Nighthawk continued to tell me more about the search party. So he mentioned the human Fishlegs; that he is also one of the heroes that fought the tyrant. That Hiccup and Fishlegs had become friends, as they found out they had a thirst for knowledge in common. Then he told me about Kjell* who had become a friend of both himself and Hiccup. Kjell had taken care of him when he had been imprisoned for a night. Again he said he would tell that story in full later. "The terrible things of the war are in the past for us, dear. To you it is all new. You have to realize that once you meet my friends, you come in touch with our past. There is no way around it. But please keep in mind that we mostly have come to terms with it."<p>

He continued "Silverwings, the dragons realise that you must be angry that they landed on your territory without your permission. They asked me to tell you that... And don't get scared when you see them, love. If you feel intimidated by their size or the way they look, just remember dragons and humans alike used to be afraid of us Night Furies. It is even the other way around: they are a bit nervous about you! You have not been influenced by our ways and you could react in an unpredictable way... I admit that I failed to correct them" he

laughed in his deep rumbling way.

We agreed that we would stand in front of a bush, so the children could choose either to watch from under our wings or hide in the bush behind us. Hiccup would walk the first dragon to a place somewhat further where they would all assemble.

>So we did. And there they came. The first dragoness to land made me gawk. She was a majestic creature that I had never seen before, and the female human that jumped off her back was much bigger and sturdier than Hiccup. Both made a bow and the dragoness spoke.
"We greet you. My name is Firestorm. I am a Firehide, what the humans call a Monstrous Nightmare."

>"I greet you, Lady, my name is Tilara" the female human said.
"Uhm, I greet you, Firestorm and Tilara. My name is Silverwings." And I bowed back.

>At that they nodded and followed Hiccup.<p>

"Don't worry about the size of this dragon species." Nighthawk said.

"I conquered a male that was even bigger. Though not with the kind of wrestling we did last year, ahem, the only effect of that was that it aroused me to no end. I will yet teach you some tricks. Oh, I shouldn't be thinking about us wrestling, it makes me want to grab you again."

>Now he had me laughing and in this lighter mood all the other dragons passed by and briefly introduced themselves. Nevertheless, when the last one walked on to the others, I found myself back practically hidden behind Nighthawk.<p>

And what about the enemy names they carried? Monstrous Nightmare... monstrous? I have never seen a more beautiful dragon in my life! The Ilnas I knew, with their colourful scales... Deadly Nadders, really! Also the Hunkin I had seen from afar. They are not beautiful to the eye, but there is something about them that instantly intrigues me. The name Gronckle suits them and does not sound as offensive as the other names. The Hideous Zippleback had me baffled, I hardly knew how to greet him as he has two heads.

The yearlings had coped quite well. They had been hiding under our wings, but we heard them chirp every now and then in a way that sounded not too frightened.

****Skip the formal introduction**

>By now all dragons had filed past us. After a brief introduction, the last one walked on to the field where all others had already assembled. Nighthawk and I walked the short distance too, keeping the yearlings between us. But when I faced the assembly, my wings nearly dropped on the children for fear of the crowd, because all dragons and humans were facing me and looked at me expectantly.

"S-so many of you, soâ€¦ such a crowd" I stammered unceremoniously. Never before had I seen so many dragons together. Even more bewildering were the humans. They were all so much sturdier than Hiccup.

>I knew I should address them properly, but words failed me. I just stood there, frozen to the spot, while the children pressed themselves against me.
Instead, Nighthawk addressed the crowd.

"You'll have to be patient for a moment. We have to give the little ones a bit of time". _And me too. Thank you, Nighthawk._ He purred to the hidden yearlings and said "Don't be afraid, my children, you can

come out now. Yes, come on, don't be shy. These are all my friends. They have been my friends for a long, long time. Ah, there you are."

>When our children peeked around my forepaws and shyly stepped out in front of us, I heard oh's and ah's from the humans, while the dragons made soft soothing sounds.<p>

Then suddenly Nighthawk exclaimed "Look! My love Silverwings and our children", unable to contain his pride and joy any longer. He raised his wings and spread them out wide over us. That gesture broke the spell and all dragons roared. The humans burst out in shouting and brought their hands together in a terrible sharp noise. At once the children shot back under my wings and I stood trembling on my legs.

"Hush, you idiots!" an Ilnas dragoness cried. "Don't you see how stressed out she is? Quiet down! Sorry Silverwings, this must be overwhelming to you. We have become a bit loud, as the humans we live with are loud."

>"WE have become loud? Speak for yourself."
"Oh shut up, you're an oaf."

>More 'comments' went back and forth until a Hunkinâ€¦ Gronckle said "Why don't we skip the formal greeting altogether? Just go about our business, so Silverwings and her yearlings can get comfortable?" His proposal got several nods and grunts of approval. Only the Monstrous Nightmare mumbled a protest "Butâ€¦ butâ€¦ what about my speech?
"Oh, later" the other Hunkin said, "there will be a suitable moment later. You will get your moment, I fear".

>Stunned, I gawked from one dragon to another.<p>

The humans had quieted down, but were still smiling. While chatting with each other, they repeatedly pointed their hands in the direction of my children. I found that gesture rather offensive, so I flicked my wings to give them a warning. Then I realised they didn't know the sign. But Hiccup had picked it up and hurriedly addressed the humans, who lowered their arms immediately.

>You have to pull yourself together, they don't mean harm, they just are soâ€¦ strange and loud.
_"Oh, Nighthawk, I behave like an idiot. But I'm glad the formal greeting is over." Now that I was recovering, I felt flattered by his enthusiasm and nuzzled him.

Hiccup walked up to Nighthawk and hugged him. They were both positively beaming. Then he addressed me, saying "Lady, I'm sorr-" But I snorted and nudged him. _No more sorry, we're through with that. And you picked up on my sign. Thank you, Hiccup."

>I lay down and gathered the little ones under a wing. They snuggled up against me being half in fear and half in wonder. To soothe them, I said "Ha ha, aren't the humans LOUD! And what a LOT of dragons." That made them chuckle and soon they were softly babbling and peeking from under my wing.

****A new nest for my children and having some fun****

>Not much later a Gronckle and a human approached us. I forgot half of the names, but remembered this human was Fishlegs, Hiccup's friend. Hiccup addressed them and said "Hello Fishlegs, Thump, have you come to speak to the Lady?"
I eyed up at the huge form of Fishlegs. Hiccup was nothing compared to this human. Yet the look in his eyesâ€¦ he seemed as gentle as Hiccup, even less cunning in a way. I would have stood up, if not for the little ones. But I craned

my neck and huffed a greeting at Fishlegs which made his big, round face start to beam. He lowered himself on his knees and hesitantly held out his hand to me. Be friendly. But somehow I had no difficulty to be friendly to this human, so I nuzzled the hand and gave it a little lick. Fishlegs was flustered. Then he looked down to where little, curious eyes were blinking.

"Your name is Thump" I said to the Gronckle. He looked short and stubby, but very strong and well-armed with fangs. "I greet you again."

"Hello Silverwings. Listen here, I have a proposal. We Gronckles build nests, it's our speciality. If you want, I can build you a safe nest for your yearlings. I have seen suitable stones nearby. In case you do not like it, don't worry, I can always use it for myself."
"Are you sure that isn't the whole point, Thump?" Nighthawk laughed, at which the Gronckle snorted indignantly.

"Watch it, Blackspeck or I'll drop a stone on your headâ€¦ again. He's a nuisance, Silverwings, he has been until his mating period last year. Since then he has been an even bigger nuisance."
"Hi hi hi, yes, make a nest, please!" I giggled. I'm having fun! I'm actually having fun with a dragon of another species!

Amazed, I watched how Thump quickly lay out somewhat more than a half-circle of stones and built a wall a paw high, adding flat stones on the grass in between. Fishlegs covered these with a layer of moss.

"Y'see, Silverwings, this way they lie well above ground and stay dry if it rains. You can make the nest safe by closing the circle with your body and putting your wing over it to shield your yearlings, see? And when you move away, they can easily hop in and out."
"It is amazingly clever, and you did it so quickly!" I replied delighted.

"Thanks. I've done a lot of nest-making recently, as my mate and I have hatchlings. They are nowâ€¦ six moon cycles old."
"Oh, but thenâ€¦ then we have to leave at once! You cannot be away from them!" I cried out confused.

"Silverwings, it is different over where we live. I miss my little ones much, but they are well taken care of. My mate is helped by other dragons. You look at things differently, because you always had to do everything on your own. But you'll see, once you are in the village your yearlings will have little friends to play with. Lucky for them, by the way, that mine are still hatchlings, because we like to head butt and our little ones like to practice that. If they'd be any bigger, they would knock yours a headache. I would like to head butt with you, as that's our formal greeting, butâ€¦" looking at Nighthawk "â€¦I've learned it's painful on your snout, huh huh huh."<p>

Thump had been wise in providing us with a nest. The yearlings at once felt safe and I relaxed because they did. When they lay down they didn't see much and when they stood up with their paws on the wall, they could watch everything from their safe spot. And at any time they could snuggle up against my body. I even could take my wing away.

>Now I had time to look around. A couple of dragons had left to hunt and the rest lazed around. The humans busied themselves with something or sat down together talking.
Nighthawk took the opportunity to rehearse the names with me. "So there is Firestorm the Monstrous Nightmare with her rider Tilaraâ€¦ Um, one thing, we say

'her rider' not 'the human that rides her' as that's too bothersome. We all know the humans don't own us and we don't own the humans that ride us. But it remains a sensitive issue, every now and then we say it out in full. Well, then we have Seabreeze, the Hideous Zippleback with his rider Baldar. Thump and Fishlegs you have already met. The other Gronckle is Smasher with his rider Finnar. Then three Deadly Nadders, the two females are Aura, who spoke to you, with her rider Haldis and Sunrise with Aina and the male is Wavedancer with my friend Kjell."

>I rehearsed the names until I knew them.<p>

Yet I had a pressing question: "Nighthawk, the humans, they will not jump on my back, will they? I will not have that, I wouldâ€¦"

>"No, they won't" he laughed "they value their life too much for that. No, if there is bonding, it often grows gradually. But if you bond with a human, you will know."
"I never will, Nighthawk."

>"I guess not, dear, and it is not necessary. There are plenty of dragons that have no bond."<p>

Then he pointed some things out. "You see the round things over there? Those are the baskets. In it, the humans carry stuff they need, mostly dried food and a blanket, you know, the wrap they sleep in. But they carry very little else as there must be room for the children. Tilara and Aina are basket makers. If any changes are necessary, they can do that or even make new baskets.

>"I cannot get over it how much they all care" I marvelled. "A Gronckle father is even away from his hatchlings."
"Yes, they do. But they also want to protect Hiccup. He needs protection, you must have noticed that. And it's a bit of an adventure too, you know. Most of them have not travelled much and wouldn't miss the opportunity to see something of the world."

****Fireweed learns how to greet the human way, and more things about the past**

>The humans every now and then looked over at us and then made distinct movements with a hand, especially while looking at my children.

>"They wave their hand" Nighthawk explained "that's a way of greeting from a distance." He looked at Fireweed who bobbed her head up and down curiously. "Do you like that, daughter?"
"Yes, like to greet."

>"Then why don't you wave back? Put up your paw like this." Before long they all stood on their hind legs, one forepaw on top of the wall, the other one raised in a greeting. But only Fireweed managed to make something like a "wave" motion and she relished in doing it again and again. Oh, it must mean so much to her proud little heart. The humans were delighted and a lot of "waving" went to and fro. But the other children soon returned to flapping their wings.
"I fear they all want to hold our children, dear" Nighthawk whispered in my ear "if they weren't so afraid of you they would come over now. I guess their hands are aching to pick them up. I can see Kjell wants to."

>"Not yet" I whispered back "but I will not hold the little ones back. If they like, they may be held."<p>

"Will you tell me about Kjell, now?" I asked him. "You mentioned he helped you?"

>"Yes, next to Hiccup he is my best friend. That's why he is here. He wouldn't miss this for the world. He and Hiccup became friends

too."
Nighthawk waited until the little ones were napping again, then softly spoke into my ear. First he repeated that the terrible things of the war had become a thing of the past. "So don't get too shocked, dear. But I will tell you about the war. Sooner or later you will hear about it and I'd rather have you hear the stories from me."

>He continued and told me how he had been imprisoned. He had to explain 'imprisoned' because I didn't understand what it meant. So I learned about the arena on Berk where the humans had made sport out of killing dragons. Where the human younglings were taught how to kill. That he had been the next dragon to die, until the decision of Hiccup's father had thrown him in another direction. I softly cried at imagining so many imprisoned dragons being slaughtered and at imagining Nighthawk awaiting his doom, helplessly bound in chains. He let me cry and just nuzzled my head.<p>

"But how did they get you, since you are so strong?"

>"I was young then. I am so much stronger now. And the humans were far more cunning than I had imaginedâ€¦ But let me tell you about Kjell now. Just like Hiccup, he secretly did something else than tribal custom demanded from him. He entered my prison the next morning and gave me water when I was so thirsty. He was gentle to me, as gentle as one can be to an enemy. When he washed my face clean of grime, I would have licked his hands in gratitude, if not the muzzle had prevented it. Kjell later helped Hiccup's father out after the fight, when Hiccup's spirit wandered far from his injured body. Hiccup's father, Stoick is his name, had made peace with me because of his son. But he had lost his wife because of us and had warred on us for so long that he didn't know how to get along on a daily basis. Kjell was young and eager though, he made things work, together with Astrid. Just like Hiccup did, once he woke up again. Look around you, Silverwings. A miracle has happened. You focus on that."
"Yes, a miracle has happened, and you too made it happen, thought I still have to hear the full story of that. But this is why you and Hiccup are heroes. And others too, like Fishlegs. Yet your story is horrible, I have to get over that."

>Noticing that after his story I looked at the humans with suspicion, Nighthawk told me "Silverwings, none of the humans here have killed dragons, we took care of that. They are mostly of the age of Hiccup, so they were too young at the time. Finnar is the only one old enough, but he has never killed a dragon. -Well, what do you say, shall we invite Kjell and Wavedancer to come over?"
"Yes, please do."

****More introductions, and Heather makes her debut****

>Kjell sat in front of us in not time. He cautiously brought his hands near my snout so I could sniff. I did, but after a sniff I looked him in the eye with gratitude and then licked his hands. I had no difficulty licking the hands that had been friendly to my love in his darkest hour. Kjell looked back at me in stunned disbelief. Then I lifted my wing somewhat, so he could see my slumbering sweetlings. Have a look, Kjell. If anyone may touch them, it is you. But not yet. Kjell looked in rapture and heaved a big sigh. "They are beautiful, Lady" he said. Then he gave Nighthawk a push and said "You're a sire now, Toothless. And with such a beautiful lady! Who could have thought that. Congratulations, bud."

>He PUSHED Nighthawk! Aw, I hope the humans will not push me, they would regret that. Although, I really must learn to put up with certain things.<p>

I looked up at Wavedancer who cocked his head to have a good look at me. After we had a good sniff of each other he said "We have all been worried, Silverwings, that you would not be able to accept Hiccup and the flying harness. And now look, you have even decided to visit Berk! Ah, you haven't seen Nighthawk dance around every night he came back, huh huh huh. He behaves like an idiot and he doesn't even care. He must love you a lot for that to happen! He always was a bit reserved, you know. But I must admit you're a pleasure to look at."

>"Well, thank you for the compliment. Though I cannot see why. I'm only of a bland black compared to the beautiful colouring of your kind."

"Ahem, thank you. But I know a fine female when I see one, even of another species. But you should hurry up to speak to the other females here, they are most anxious to get to know you."

By now the children had woken up. Before long they were 'waving' again. I noticed how Heather's eager little body reached out so far that she almost fell over the wall.

>It gave me an idea and I stood up, moving away from the opening of the nest. Maybe it's time for you to bring your special gift into the world, my little one.

>"Nighthawk" I whispered "see Heather? What if we let her do what she wants. Will you watch over her? I'll stay here with the rest."

"Heather, do you like to go over there and say hello?"

>"Can I, mammy? Oh yes, yes!"

"Just this once. Off you go, sweetling."

Heather hopped out of the nest and lightly padded over to where most of the dragons and humans sat together. Once there she looked up at the expectant faces, flapped her little wings and said "PEEP" loud and clear. The dragons chuckled and Sunrise, the Nadder dragoness, lowered her head to nuzzle her. The humans took care to keep quiet. When Heather saw the big head coming her way she cringed, stepping back. But then suddenly something happened that surprised us all: in a flash her brothers were at her side; they kept her body in between theirs and spread their wings over her. Boulder hissed at the lowered head while Tumble merely looked up scared.

>They even surprised Nighthawk who in one jump was near them. "Oh, there, there, my sons, how brave you are, well done! But see? Sunrise is only going to say hello."
Sunrise had lifted her head again and now cocked it to get a clear look at the little Furies below "You little males are very brave. As brave as your father is! And just as protective. And your sister is brave too." They liked that, and relaxed. She continued "Will you three not give me a nose? I would like that very much." All three stepped back somewhat when the big head was lowered again, but Nighthawk whispered to them and then all three pressed their noses against the huge chin in front of them. "Thank you, young ones. What are your names?"

>"Heather... greet you". "Oh, how properly spoken!" Sunrise said. My sons also greeted her. "My name is Sunrise" she replied "and the name of my human friend is Aina. Shall we walk back to your mother?" <p>

Once with me she said: "Dear Silverwings, here are your brave little ones. And there are your other children, I see. Hello sweeties. Silverwings, I hope you feel comfortable with us soon. We will hunt for you and protect you so you can relax. I personally find you a very brave dragoness, to decide to come with us to our island. And you touched my heart already last year because of the happiness of

our Toothless. That is what I had to say to you." And she started to turn around.

****About names**

>"Sunrise", I quickly said "can I ask you something? And thank you for your words."

>"Yes, of course."
"Do the-humans-that-ride-you know your names? I ask, because soon we will walk around and greet everyone, including the humans. I would like them to use our proper names. It would somehow bother me if they gave us different names. Our names are easy to point out, you know, Pinecone and such. They may also know my name, as it is only a youngling name."

>"Sure you can point out your names to the humans. Some dragons do. But the humans give us names as well. The name Sunrise was given to me by Aina, and I like it a lot. The humans tend to give us worthy names. In fact, Toothless is the only dragon with a silly name. But he refuses to give it up and we have all grown past the silliness of it. You surely know his real name?"
"Yes, but if he hasn't told you, I may not. But I have grown accustomed to both of his names."

>"Another thing, Silverwings, do you know what the meaning is of the name Hiccup gave you: 'Lady'?"
"No, though N - Toothless likes the sound of it."

>"It means: a female that is held in high esteem. What about that!"
I didn't know what to say to that. But then I chuckled "it surely means that he was mighty afraid of me. He was, you know."

>'Um, we all were, a bit, to be honest."
"Yes, Toothless told me, and also why. But I know nothing about being dominant over other species of dragons, as dragonesses here in the taiga all have their own territory. In fact, I would appreciate it if you help me behave in the way you are accustomed to."

>"Oh, we'll do that, no problem. But can I ask you why you still carry your youngling name? And why you are called Silverwings, when you are completely black?"<p>

"I still carry my youngling name, as my mother died before she could give my brothers and me our adult names. When I was a youngling, my wings were not a mottled grey, but one shade of grey. Light grey. So that's why."

>"Oh, I am sorry to hear that your mother died so early in your life. And I take it that there were no other dragons around to raise you?"
"Thank you. No, I have been hard without her, but we managed, my brothers and I."

>"Oh, that must have been hard on you, younglings and all. With us, back in the war, also younglings lost their parents, but then others were around to raise them."
"I'm sure you will tell me a lot, about Berk, and your past. And I will tell you more about my life here. But all in good time, please."

>Sunrise chuckled. "And you tell us, dear, when it's enough. Or we'll talk your ears off."
I chuckled too.

>"Can I nuzzle goodbye?" she asked. "That's what friends do."
"Y-yes, do" I stammered surprised.

>Sunrise nuzzled me and I looked after her when she walked back to Aina.
_Friendsâ€|. _

"Ha ha, you smile, dear. That's nice."

>"Oh, Nighthawk, there you are. I want to do something, and quick." And I told him that I wanted Hiccup to learn the names of our children, so he could tell the other humans. So, not much later

Nighthawk, Hiccup, the children and I walked a distance away from the camp. Hopefully we could get Hiccup to understand. To find a pinecone was easy, they lay strewn around and Toothless gathered one in his mouth. When we reached a patch of heather Nighthawk started. He nudged Hiccup and gave him a certain hard stare.
"You want to tell me something."

>A nod from Nighthawk.
Then I saw how he used the human way of pointing. First he pointed to Pinecone and then to the pinecone in front of her. Then he pointed to Heather and to the heather behind her. Then he gave Hiccup again a hard stare.

>"Umâ€¦ pinecone, heather. But what does that have to do with the yearlings? It has something to do with the yearlings?"
A nod.

>Hiccup looked puzzled. "Do they need this? As food? To play with?"
A shake. Nighthawk gave it a thought.

>Then he sat down next to Pinecone, opened his mouth, showed his teeth and then retracted them. Then he pointed again at the children and the pinecone and heather.
"Your retractable fangs, your children, a pinecone and heather."

>Nighthawk nodded and stared.
As Hiccup did not understand, he nudged him, gaped his empty gums at him, made his teeth shoot up, retracted them again and nudged him again.

>"Yes, your retractable teeth, that's why I called you Toothless."
Now Nighthawk nodded enthusiastically and pointed again at Pinecone and the pinecone in front of her. He sat down again next to her, showed his empty gums and pointed again.

>"Toothlessâ€¦ your daughter, a pineconeâ€¦
After a sharp nod of Nighthawk, Hiccup continued "Toothlessâ€¦ your daughter, a pinecone, your other daughter, heatherâ€¦ Your other daughter HEATHERâ€¦ oh, butâ€¦ Toothless, you want me to call her Heather?"

>Now Nighthawk jumped up and gave him a wild lick.
Hiccup turned to me and asked amazed "Lady, you want me to know the names of your children?"

>I nodded a clear yes.
Now he tickled Heather "Your name is Heather!" "And you are called Pinecone!" making them giggle. Pinecone took the pinecone in her mouth, and strutted around waving it.

>"Oh, but that is wonderful! And what is your name?" he asked Boulder.
Before long he knew them all. Tumble had to tumble quite a bit, but finally Hiccup had his name too.

>"Oh, Ladyâ€¦" he began, but I nudged him and shook my head.
"No?"

>I sat down, spread my wings and flapped them while giving Hiccup a hard stare also.
"Wingsâ€¦ you want me to know your name too?"

>A nod.
"Just Wings?"

>A shake. But we could not make him understand the 'silver' part. But sooner or later Hiccup would find out, and now he knew that I preferred my own name.
Then he looked at Nighthawk. "Will you tell me your name too, bud? I know you didn't want to before, but maybe nowâ€¦?"

>Nighthawk hesitated, nodded, then shook his head.
"Ha ha, no pressure, bud. But what if I promise to keep calling you Toothless, can I know your name then?"

>A nod.<p>

****Evensong****

>Back in the camp the hunters had arrived with prey. So first we ate. To my amazement the humans took slabs of meat and singed them over fires.
"It's one of the weird things about humans" Nighthawk

explained. The spoil perfect food by singing it or boiling it in water. They call that 'cooking'. They 'cook' nearly all of their food, even the bread you saw Hiccup eat is something heated. We mock them with this and they mock us, saying "We heat our food before eating it and you dragons heat it afterwards!" As if we digest our food by burning it! You know, that sort of nonsense goes back and forth. They have become familiar with ourâ€¦ let's say abrasive sense of humour and often notice when we make fun of them. But they also know ways to make us look ridiculous, which is hard to bear. And they know that!"

When we had finished eating it was well into the evening. Sensing the time, Nighthawk said "If we want to do some further greeting we should hurry a bit, it's nearly Evensong."

>"What is-"
>"You'll see. Come on children, go sit on our backs. Let's say hello to Seabreeze and Baldar. They ran up our tails and we walked over to the Zippleback. Baldar was not with him at the moment.

>"Seabreeze, do Silverwings a favour and keep your heads together, please."
>"Hello Silverwings, hello little ones. Beats me why he asks me this. I always keep my heads together, even when they're apart."

>"Um, which head do I speak to, if I may ask?" I said.
>"Oh, what a polite way of asking you have. You can talk back to the head that talks to you, this one. Have you never seen one of our kind before?"

>"No, you're the first. But I have seen the Ilnas and the Hunkinâ€¦ um, Nadders and Gronckles before. Shall I tell you the names of our children?"
>"Please do. They are brave little things I heard."

>I told him, and each little one mentioned flapped its wings.
>"Bit of a warning here" Seabreeze said "Firestorm plans to hold her speech after Evensong, so be prepared."

Nighthawk brought us back to the nest and told the yearlings to hop in.

>"Listen, you all, we're having Evensong any moment now".
I saw the humans putting their things away and settle themselves next to the fires. Then a most curious sound started to rise up. I looked around, it was the dragons that made it. They softly cooed, purred and hummed. The sound was not so much loud as intense. The air vibrated with it and the effect of it was soothing. I looked at the children in the nest. They lay down and became droopy-eyed. I also lay down and rested my head against the side of Nighthawk who joined the sound with a low rumble. _What an attractive rumble you make, dear. Appealing, soâ€¦ maleâ€¦ soâ€¦ reminds me of somethingâ€¦ somethingâ€¦ mmmmâ€¦"_

The crowing of ravens in the trees woke me up. Nosy birds, always poking around. Took them long to check this camp out. Yesterday evening I must have fallen asleep during Evensong. What is that, why do they 'sing'? Oh, Firestormâ€¦ she must have been so disappointed. Drowsily I looked around. Nighthawk had closed the nest and his wing stretched out over our children. I quietly lifted the wing somewhat. Immediately Nighthawk's eyes shot open. "Sorry dear, it's me having a peek." With a huff he lay his head down again. The children were fine.

>Firestorm, Aura and Sunrise were up. They nodded to me and took wing, oh of course, to go out hunting. Finnar was also awake, watching over the camp, wrapped in a blanket. He nodded to me too. It was still early morning, the sun had just started to climb the sky.

Everyone else was still asleep. Nighthawk had fallen asleep again and snored softly. A sheen of dew covered everything except us dragons and shimmered in the morning light. So nice to be out in the open, in the freshness of the moist air under the pale blue sky.
And I drifted off again.

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* about **Kjell**: in my story 'After the crash, the tale of Toothless', Toothless is kept in prison for one night before he was hoisted on a ship to direct the Vikings to the dragon's nest. A boy of Hiccup's age, Kjell, visited Toothless, brought him water, and was kind to him. He also did not want to learn to kill dragons and considered leaving Berk. Needless to say Toothless became fast friends with him and Hiccup also.

**So, next time they will be on their way to Berk.
Promised.**

Will you review?

8. On the wing

Summary

Silverwings has been able to accept the fact that her lover Nighthawk has a close bond with a human. Through ups and downs she is able to understand and accept Hiccup more and more. Nighthawk is overjoyed to meet his children, and the little ones have their first flying experience on their father's back. At some point Silverwings is told that a company of dragons and humans is nearby. If she is willing to visit to Berk, the others are there to carry her children in a basket.

She agrees to visit, and the previous chapter was all about meeting the other dragons and humans. Thump, a practical Gronckle, makes a nest for her. Little Fireweed's pride is tickled when of all yearlings she alone manages to make the "wave" motion back to the humans. The humans take care to keep their distance from the wild dragoness and her young. Heather is allowed to make her first introduction, but when she gets a bit scared, her brothers rush in to protect her, thus showing the protective nature of Night Furies even at this young age. Nighthawk introduces Fishlegs, and also Kjell, his best friend next to Hiccup. Silverwings is surprised to find that she is able to accept them so much easier than Hiccup. She has deeply hidden reasons why she still has reservations towards him, and in this chapter she discovers what is at the bottom of it.

Silverwings, who never had a friend, feels the first stirrings of friendship when she warms to Sunrise, a female Nadder. Sunrise tells her that dragons sometimes point out their names to humans. Silverwings wants the humans to use the real names of her children, and of herself. Nighthawk succeeds in making Hiccup understand. Nighthawk also agrees to reveal his own true name to Hiccup, as long as Hiccup continues to call him Toothless. After meeting Seabreeze, the Zippleback, they settle down for Evensong.

A list of the dragons and their riders:

>Firestorm, female Monstrous Nightmare (Firehide) with ****Tilara****, woman, hunter and basketmaker

>Seabreeze, male Hideous Zippleback with ****Baldar****, man, hunter

>Thump, male Gronckle (Hunkin) with ****Fishlegs****, dragon expert and writer

>Smasher, male Gronckle with ****Finnar****, man. His role will be revealed in this chapter

>Aura, female Deadly Nadder (Ilnas) with ****Haldis****, woman and cook

>Sunrise, female Deadly Nadder with ****Aina****, woman, hunter and basket maker

>Wavedancer, male Deadly Nadder with ****Kjell****, man, former caretaker of captive dragons

****Journey in this chapter****: Starting in Karelia, North-West Russia, they fly over Finland and Sweden, and arrive at the eastern side of the Norwegian mountains after a 7-day's flight. After a night's rest they cross the mountains to the coast of the Atlantic Ocean.

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****Chapter 8. On the wing****

****During flight****

>Evensong. Nighthawk explained that to me. "It originates from the time when we were slaves" he said. "It was the only thing She had no control over. Deep within the soul of each dragon, still some individuality survived, hidden away in a secluded part. So each dragon reached deep inside and made the sound that welled up from within. All sounds combined produced the Song. The Song kept us sane and united us, if only for a moment. It comforted us in times of misery and loss. If at times you could not sing yourself, the Song was still around you and carried you. She tried to snuff it out and tried to grab each dragon that started the Song. Nevertheless we sang every dayâ€¦| Once on Berk, we continued this habit, much to the astonishment of the humans. Dragons join the Song of free will, they are not forced to do it. But then of course we cannot be forced to do anything. Still the Song continues to the present day. It became a habit to sing at dusk and the humans of Berk use it a point of reference. They put their work down by then, and say things like "See you after Evensong" or to their children "You have to come home at Evensong." <p>

I mulled this over in my head, and all other new things, during flight. We had taken wing and were on our way to Berk. I had to get accustomed to long distance flying again as it had been quite some time ago that I had done that. I hadn't expected to feel comfortable in this group so soon. Everyone helped to make me feel at home and I feel so cared for and safe. Though at times I can't help but miss the solitude and my own rhythm.

Being up in the air with Nighthawk is simply wonderful. I cannot get enough of watching my lover fly, his muscles rippling, his body fluently moving with every wing beat. He does not yet possess the mature majesty of Thundercloud, but he is not far off anymore. At some point Hiccup noticed my admiration and spoke laughingly into Nighthawk's ear, getting a playful smack back. As if Nighthawk

himself did not feel my eyes resting on him! And I his eyes burning into me! At times when the yearlings were napping, we broke away from the group just to fly together for a while. When after a couple of days of flight I had my stamina back, he and I really went for it. As soon as the luggage had been put on the ground we set off, chasing each other, circling around each other, flying high up, then firmly gripping each other's paws and spiralling down again. I had to do my part to balance us out with the weight of Hiccup on his back, but it was not even that difficult. We screamed our excitement and Hiccup screamed along with us, which oddly felt right.

Just a few days ago I had finally come to grips with Hiccup. While flying, I again pondered the fact that I kept feeling a certain reservation towards Hiccup. A reservation that I did not feel towards Fishlegs or Kjell. What was it that bothered me?

>Suddenly it struck me: what I felt was DREAD. And then I realised I did not dread Hiccup himself, but his ability to invent. That word I learned from Nighthawk. Hiccup invents things. Unlike Fishlegs or Kjell he makes things that were not there before. He invented both the contraption that shot Nighthawk down, and the harness that made him fly again. It is this ability to invent that I dread. It surpasses by far the ability of a spider to build a web, or of a Gronckle to build a nest. It is of an entirely different order and unnatural. And if Hiccup is able to invent these sort of things, so will other humans, sooner or later. Will these humans also make the choice of Hiccup, to refrain from destruction? I fear not.
It angered me to realize how powerful Hiccup's inventions are. With his contraption Hiccup had conquered Nighthawk, a Night Fury, the deadliest dragon on earth. So, in a way, we dragons are defeated already. It will only be a matter of time before deadlier inventions overpower us completely. For unlike humankind, we do not invent or develop.

>My thoughts went even further: if humankind is capable of clearing us out of their way, then they may well conquer the whole earth, for we are the strongest. Already humans have become numerous and claim ever more territory...
I looked around me. Strange, that no dragon or human in this merry party seemed to realise these things.

Once I realised what troubled me, a seething hatred coursed through me, blinding every bit of sane thinking. _Humans! Humans will be our doom. Destroy this inventor! Destroy the humans, because in time they surely will destroy us!_ I tensed up and my fire built. I had a clear shot of Hiccup in front of me.

Luckily I came to my senses in time and I deflated. I couldn't simply blast Hiccup out of the sky, as Nighthawk would crash. The humans carry my children. What am I thinking?

>I sobered up and my head cleared. Killing like this, not for food, but to prevent things from happening... it's not good. Killing these humans will solve nothing, the only thing it will do, I sense, is ruin my soul. I alone cannot stem the tide of humans. Because what do I really know? Some things I fear may never come to pass. Or maybe the age of dragons on earth will come to an end, and a time comes when we will be gathered back into the fiery heart of the Creator. There simply is no way of knowing.
No, I decided, I will join the 'miracle of Berk'. Share the strange miracle of dragons and humans living together. Now that I had processed it all, I shook myself free of all dread. I can do nothing about the choices that other creatures make. In time I will share these thoughts with Nighthawk, as I will not keep my thoughts from him anymore.

Now that the feelings of dread have cleared away, I finally see how amazing Hiccup is. What he has accomplished. What... a hero he is. _Oh Hiccup, you bore the brunt of my contempt. Now I sense how much you have had to bear in life, all alone. Now I fully understand why Nighthawk respects you and supports you. And I understand why you need his formidable strength and unwavering friendship. I too will support you from now on.____>So, not long after we landed that day, I signalled Hiccup to follow me. And when we returned to the camp, Nighthawk saw us coming: Hiccup's hand trustingly resting on my head, the same way he steadied Hiccup himself.

****The baskets ****

>The distance we were able to cover on a day was limited. One reason was that I had to adjust to long distance flying again. The other was the children, travelling in the baskets. They manage to keep happy in their basket for about half a day. That is, if we don't hear one call "Mammy, I have to poo". Then we land, but we quickly learned to not let them all out, as they make it into a game to avoid being put in the baskets again. To see the humans scramble after them while they darted just out of their reach was so amusing that it took a while before I started to help out. But half a day approximately, that's all they can take. Then they miss each other too much and start to pine and wail.<p>

The baskets had to be adjusted. When the lids closed over the little ones for the first time, they were very unhappy. All screamed and Fireweed and Boulder even tried to fight their way out. For a moment we were all at a loss. If the children cannot stand being in the baskets, we cannot travel. The solution came when even my brave Boulder broke and sobbed "Mammy... I can't SEE you, mammy." So they had to be able to SEE ! Aina and Tilara quickly made holes in the sides of the baskets, so the children could poke their heads through and look around. The holes were nimbly lined with leather, so it was both firm and soft.

After that things worked out wonderfully. Five humans each carry a basket with a yearling in it, strapped to their backs. The others, including Nighthawk, carried everything else. I carried nothing, not yet anyway. I could not yet overcome my aversion to having anything attached to me. However, unburdened like this, I could freely manoeuvre close to the baskets, when one of my children called for me. Both Nighthawk and I flew behind the other dragons, so the children saw us the instant they looked out of the baskets. During flight they babbled with each other and asked us as many questions as there are stars in the sky.

****Evening in the valley******

>It had taken us seven days to cover the distance to the mountains. We arrived late this afternoon and landed in a valley some way up the slopes of the mountains. We relished in breathing the fresh air because up here the air is not as hot and stifling as down below on the plains. Once we cross these mountains, we will see the ocean. The ocean! Just one more day of flight.

Every afternoon, when the baskets are opened, the children leap out with a yell. First, they bump into me, then into each other. Then they run and run, to release all of their pent-up energy. The humans have learned to wait before lighting fires, as the yearlings storm

straight through the flames, scattering the wood. They are not entirely fireproof yet , so we heard a couple of yelps. But there is no reasoning with the yearlings when they are just out of the baskets. Even the dragons wait a while before they lie down and then first scan the spot thoroughly or count all little grey heads in view.

I myself have learned to let go, to let my children go... That is, I am still learning. But dragons and humans alike take great care of them. It was even the other way around, I had to rebuke the children. They had become insolent towards the humans, because the humans hardly dared to check them out of fear for my wrath. Fireweed even bit Haldis in the hand because Haldis didn't do something she wanted. I had to have a serious talk with my daughter. That took a while, because the little thing was very cross and couldn't see what she had done wrong. I couldn't help but feel for her, as until recently I would have done even worse to a human. Fireweed must have unconsciously picked up my disdain for humans that lasted until recently. I told her that I had changed my mind about humans and that we both would apologize. So I set the example and bowed to Haldis. Then I made Fireweed bow, which still hurt her pride. The whole thing hurt my pride too, but it was necessary. Then I lined up all of the children and we all made a bow towards the humans. That was a couple of days ago and it set things straight. Now the humans dare to correct them too.

Aina is really nice. How odd, that I say this about a female human â€| a woman. She often comes over to sit with me and talk to me. Strange, how humans at the same time do and do not believe we understand them, so they tend to speak their hearts. Aina adores Pinecone who travels with her in the basket, which makes her speak about her wish for children of her own. She has a lover at Berk and this autumn they are going to have their wedding. That's how she calls the ceremonious start of her mating period, as far as I understand. So, an egg will be on the way soon. Humans seem to lay only one egg at a time, which they call a baby. To me it's strange they lay only one egg, but I keep an open mind. What works for one creature doesn't necessarily work for another, it's as simple as that.

Today, after landing, I had climbed up from the valley floor, so now I lay on an outcrop overlooking the camp. Everyone knew I distanced myself from time to time. Soon I heard a rustle and then "Lost in your head again?" It was Nighthawk, climbing up to me.

>"Hi, you didn't have to play hide-and-seek with the little ones?" I asked back. But as soon as I asked, I realized I hadn't heard the exited screams when a yearling was found and their father made a scaring face before flipping them over.
"Well, someone WAS hiding, but I found her" he replied. Suddenly, in a move like a flash, he flipped me over on my back, pinned me, and with a rogue smirk looked down on my astonished face. "Got you. And WHAT a catch! Hmmm, you look tasty, Lady. I guess I'll have my dinner here." At that he went to nipping, biting and licking me until I was breathless with screaming and giggling.

>Today we had flown over the general area of the mating ground of last year. We looked around to see if we could find the exact meadow again, but one resembled the next so much that we didn't find our playfield of last year. Nevertheless, a joy gripped us, and we had flown high up, luggage and all, to come soaring down again full speed several times.<p>

"Tell me what went on in your head, darling" Nighthawk asked somewhat later. He had settled, placed his body firmly against mine and put a wing over me. Contented with our intimacy, I nuzzled him.

>"I was taking in this new landscape of mountains. It's like the hills I came from, but far wider and steeper. And now I leave everything I know behind."
"Sorry you came?"

>"No, not at all, you know that, don't tease me." Yet I absorbed the solidity of his body against mine. "My 'adventure' couldn't be safer, with you near and all the other dragons. And you told me you know the way, so we cannot get lost. And the children have the time of their lives. Look at them."

We looked down. The yearlings were playing on the back of Firestorm. Her broad back between the double row of spiky fins is prime playground. Everyone is relieved when all yearlings are somewhere in view. Apparently they were done with the humans already.

>After running their first energy off, they often go back to the humans that carry them. They love being stroked and scratched.
Boulder is always 'fighting' with Kjell, bouncing on his belly when once more he has 'downed' the man. But on another occasion I saw Kjell tenderly hold a napping Boulder in his hands, that are exceptionally large.

>Tumble loves to run up Thump's back and then jump high up, trusting to be caught by Fishlegs. He flaps his wings wildly as he wants to fly SO much.
Sometimes all yearlings gather around Thump and Fishlegs, and attempt to build a nest. That means they busy themselves with stones and moss, having a lot of fun. "But" Thump sighed to me "they simply don't have it in them."

>Fireweed has come to an understanding with Haldis. She doesn't want to be held other than with her consent, but at times when Haldis isn't busy cooking, she perks on the shoulder of the large woman, looking around smugly and enjoying the feel of Haldis' soft yellow hair that sometimes hangs loose.
All three little females often rove around to find all kinds of materials and then watch Tilara and Aina weave it into different shapes.

But when Finnar unwraps his harp, all yearlings rush to him, eager to hear him play. Then he plays them simple tunes. Finnar also listens when Pinecone sings. She has picked up on Evensong and has started to 'sing' herself. To her it comes natural, it just wells up from within her. So, as often as she feels like singing with Finnar, he places her next to his harp and then listens with attention to her soft, silvery voice. After she is done, he tries to make his harp sing likewise. Yesterday it must have worked out fine, as my daughter came back to me beaming. "I bring him a song, mama, and then he weaves it. Like Aina weaves things we bring." And off she was to join her siblings. _Oh, my child, my precious little one. You leave me speechless when you say things like this. Where does it come from? I don't recognise this, it's not inside me. I wish... You remind me of Thundercloud. Sometimes I wish you were a child of his being_

-

But I will always cherish the night Finnar sang, and the wonderful day after_

****The night of the harp******

>On the evening before the day of our departure, everyone was jumpy in anticipation of something special to happen. I did not know what to expect, other than that it was a surprise and afterwards

Firestorm would hold her speech. But this time no one gave the secret away, not even Sunrise, the chattery Nadder. We liked each other and she kept me informed about a lot of details that the males didn't realise were important to a mother. A surpriseâ€¦| hmm, I wasn't too keen on surprises anymore, but as Nighthawk beamed along with the rest, it could not be too bad.

After Evensong all dragons and humans sat down in a semi-circle with Finnar in front. The children lay in the nest sleepily, in front of Nighthawk and me. Finnar took something large out of a wrap and placed it before me for a sniff. It was a thing made of wood, but so smooth it gleamed. Between the wood were strands like a spider's web, only the strands were thicker and went parallel, every next one slightly longer than the last.

>"This is a harp, my Lady" Finnar said. "An instrument to make music. I am a bard. I make music on the harp and I sing. You listen."<p>

With that, he stroked one of the strands. Instantly my ears flew up, as the harp spoke! It spoke to me with a beautiful voice... vibrant, sweet and crystal clear. Unlike anything I had heard before. I gazed in rapture at the vibrating strand. The more it stilled, the softer it spoke. Eventually I tilted my head and held my ear practically against it, to hear the voice fade away into silence. Then I looked up at Finnar, eyes wide and smiling.

>"Thank you" I huffed "for making the harp speak. It was beautiful. Thank you."<p>

He understood me, but said "This is not all, Lady. You just heard one tone. There are more tones. And together they make music. Herewith I invite you to listen to the music."

>He returned to his place in front and placed the harp against his chest. He made the instrument speak a new tone, this time much lower. It spoke in gentle waves until it also stilled, like ripples flatten out in a pond.
Then he stroked more strands at the same time and a sound emerged, incomprehensibly beautiful. It went straight to my heart. I leaned against Nighthawk, needing to feel the solidity of his body. He softly stroked my head and said "This is in your honour, my darling." I rested my head against his, unable to say anything.

Music... it is a wonder... I cannot begin to explain it. It was like a dream and it filled me till overflowing. At first, it fluttered like butterflies' wings. Next, it evoked a gentle rain, falling through the branches of the trees. Then the rippling of spiders' silk, covering whole patches of grass. Then something like the trotting of a fox, when it moves through the undergrowth. Then the rattling of aspen leaves in the wind. Then again it picked up speed, like a little stream hurrying towards the river.

>The loveliness of it pierced my heart. It lifted me up like my wings do, and transported me. It reminded me of the vision Nighthawk and I shared. I looked at Nighthawk, looked into his eyes, and once again drowned in them.<p>

Luckily the bard ended the music, before it became too much to bear. The children, that lay motionless with their eyes closed, stirred again.

>I walked over to Finnar, bowed my head in gratitude and nudged both of his hands.
"Thank you, Lady, it is all my pleasure. But it is not over yet. There is also a song I would like to sing. The music to

this song is far more simple, so it lies easier on the ear. This song is to honour Hiccup and Toothless, and it's a surprise for them."

>While I walked back, I saw that both Nighthawk and Hiccup looked stunned. But all dragons and humans were whispering and casting meaningful glances. They certainly had kept this secret well.<p>

"Ye dragons, male and female and ye people, men and women. Now I will sing to you 'The Song of Hiccup and Toothless, the Heroes of Berk'."

>The children, that had woken up, cried out in surprise. They turned around to Nighthawk and once again cheered "A hero! Father is a hero! You are a hero, father!" We could barely calm them down enough for Finnar to start singing.<p>

A tale unfolded about how Hiccup had met Toothless and how they befriended each other, although I did not understand all the words. About their suffering, apart from each other and together. And about how they had conquered the vile creature that had controlled the dragons. Many names were mentioned. Stoick, Hiccup's father and chief of his tribe. Astrid, Hiccup's mate. Fishlegs and Kjell. More names were sung of humans unknown to me, and their deeds mentioned. The names of dragons entered the tale once Peace had come.

>As the story unfolded, I understood so much more about Nighthawk and about what he and Hiccup had been up against. I cast him a glance, seeing him gulp. Hiccup leaned against Nighthawk's shoulder, listening enraptured, tears streaming down his face. I was moved to the core, as the song continued to wound and at the same time heal me.<p>

A certain set of lines were repeated over and over. All humans started to sing them with increasing certainty. Even the dragons had started to hum, drone and coo. The bard picked that up for, once the song had ended, he tuned in on the singing of the dragons. The music of the harp ran lightly into the middle of the dragon-song, much like Heather had padded over to the dragons for the first time. Then it dove under, emerged again and rose above it. Our children burst out in song and added their sweet voices to the music. My heart could not contain the fullness of it anymore and now I cooed along too. Nighthawk also found his voice and joined the song with his specific rumble.

For a while the music soared through the dragon song much like a dragon soars through the clouds. Then it gradually slowed which calmed us down, like we all descended from the sky and softly touched ground. After that we all fell asleep, more or less on the spot.

****One precious day together******

>The morning after, it became clear that we had to delay the departure for another day as I was beside myself and the children too. Nighthawk had the wisdom to take us away, back to the nest. There we rested, and laughed and cried about many things mentioned by Finnar in his song.

To this day, I treasure that one day when there was just the two of us and the children. Nobody came near, not even Hiccup. Only Sunrise came over briefly to bring some food.

>I was deeply touched that the humans had done so much to honour Nighthawk and Hiccup. And to please me, a dragoness they did not even

know. It took away any remaining doubt about visiting Berk. If there are humans that reach out to dragons like the humans here, and can touch a dragon's heart as deeply as Finnar did last night, I am confident that things will work out. And that I'll be able to cope with less kind treatment. Nighthawk had been honest and told me that on Berk there are still humans who are hostile to dragons, mostly because dragons killed their loved ones in the war.<p>

This treasured day also made me certain that I never wanted to leave Nighthawk again. This wish had been growing in my heart, but I had to muster the courage to speak to him about this. Last year he asked me, but would he still feel the same? It's so unusual. Things change.

>"Nighthawk, I wish to ask you something. I'm so nervousâ€|"

"Ask me. Why are you nervous? Don't be. Tell me, darling" he said amazed.

>"Nighthawk, what ifâ€| what if no party has to bring me back to the Mainland this fall? I want to be with you so much and .. and not part again. Do you... could we..."
"Silverwings? Youâ€| you mean for us to..."

>"â€|stay together? Nighthawk?"
"Silverwings... How..."

>"That's what I feel deep inside. It has been growing ever since last year, since... our vision. And our days together just... and the music yester eve, it was... it was almost as beautiful as our vision. So I remembered our vision so clearly again. I must tell you... last year I made a vow to myself, that you would never be lonely again if I could do anything about it. I... I still feel the same, it has only grown stronger. But now I realise something else, Nighthawk. It is also the other way around. If you left me, I would feel so very lonely. If you went away... If I think about the next mating period, I only want you. I do not want another male in my life."<p>

"I... but... Silverwings, if another male comes for you, I cannot defend you. I can never win a fight over you with another male."

>"But I can refuse him. If necessary we can both fight him off and chase him away. Nighthawk... don't look away, love, don't be ashamed. Look at me... Never be ashamed anymore. Never think you are not male enough for me. You are. You already are."
Nighthawk sunk his head against mine. "Oh, my love, can this be true? I somehow hoped... that if you visited my island... that at least... at least you would be near... for a while. But then you would know where to find me. Or maybe... maybe you would like it there. Enough to stay. So at least I could... see you... see our children grow. And now you ask me..." He pulled away a bit, straightened himself and said "My love, if by the next mating period you have not changed your mind... then I'll mark you as my own."

>I nuzzled him "You might as well mark me now. We'll stay together."<p>

That last remark was overheard by the children. How true is the saying "Little hatchlings, big ears." They had been half-listening to us; we'll have to take care what we say in their presence. After they bounced around for happiness, they rolled over and fell asleep again. I looked at their sleeping bodies and suddenly sighed.

>"You sigh. What is it Silverwings?"
"Now my children will grow up so much different than my ancestors. They will grow up in a busy, crowded village. Maybe they will befriend humans, like so many dragons have. They will not grow up to be free dragons of the Taiga anymore."

>"But still be dragons. And free, as no human owns us."
That brightened me up. "You are right" I said. We snuggled against one another and whispered on a while, before dozing off.

Today, sitting on the outcrop, we spoke about that day again, basking in the glow of love.

>"We have to go down now, it's time to eat" I said. "And socialize. I'm still not very good at that, I fear." "You're doing fine" Nighthawk replied. It simply takes time. It's not like the mushrooms that grow overnight. Speaking about mushrooms, let's see what's on the menu."<p>

****Our flight over the mountains******

>Next morning we rose very early. Even before sunrise we were ready for take-off. Getting to the other side of the mountains would take all day. The yearlings, still drowsy with sleep had been placed in the baskets, this time covered with a blanket as we would rise high up in the air and it would be freezing.

>I was excited and fidgety. Nighthawk came to stand next to me, while we both watched the last preparations. When all was ready, he nuzzled me and said, "Here we go, darling. If everything goes well, you'll see the sun set in the ocean tonight. It will be a long day for the children, though."<p>

The moment the first rays of sunlight touched the mountain tops above us, we set off. We flew a stretch away from the mountainside in order to avoid turbulence. Then we climbed higher and higher. As soon as the sunlight hit the land below, it started an updraft that lifted Nighthawk and me up, and Firestorm also to a degree. Our large wings allowed us to rise on the currents, spiralling up, with hardly a wing beat. But unfortunately the wingspan of the Nadders and Gronckles didn't allow for that. Especially the Gronckles could only gain height by beating their wings incessantly. Lucky for them they have an incredible stamina. But that didn't keep them from complaining all the way up. They were huffing and puffing and Smasher complained "As soon as we're home, I'm not going to move a limb for half a moon cycle". Nevertheless, all dragons had been eager to take this last hurdle and see the ocean again.

Eventually we had gained enough altitude to start crossing the mountains. But even though we flew well above the mountain tops, there was still a lot of turbulence. Sometimes we twirled around like leaves in the wind. Most dangerous were the sudden downdrafts, as they could suck you down and smash you into the mountain side. So we tried to climb ever higher.

By now the children had had enough. For a time they excitedly shouted "Whee, whee!" when we were tossed around by the wind once more. But when it didn't stop, they grew tired of it and started to whine. They also had to poo in their baskets for the first time. We had rehearsed what to do, but now it was for real. "Dig a hole in the moss, then poo, and cover it up. Remember?" I told them. They did, because they had no choice. But they hated it and one after another started to wail. They wailed on and on, while I tried to console them as well as I could, to no avail. Eventually they grew so tired that they fell asleep. That is, I hoped so, as they didn't answer me anymore.

Now that I wasn't so occupied anymore I had the time to look at the landscape below. Beneath us the mountains glistened with snow, everything was white. What was new to me though, were the glaciers.

Stretched out below us, massive bodies of ice sparkled in unimaginable hues of blue. We looked down on the frozen landscape below us, so beautiful, yet forbidding. The glare of the ice was blinding and stung my eyes. Often I squeezed my eyes shut, shaking my head.

Yet I loved the cold, thin air we flew in. I told Nighthawk how I, when I was still without children, would often fly up high. Especially at night, to enjoy the serenity and quiet under the stars. Nighthawk's eyes had begun to shine when I told him this. He told me it was his favourite too. "Let's do this together!" he shouted. "But how do you do that?" I shouted back. "Fly all night with Hiccup on your back?" Then he told me how Hiccup had found a way. That he used a very different and rather clumsy harness on these occasions. That, once up high, Hiccup put the tailfin in a fixed position and then lay down flat on his belly, his legs secured within a kind of hooks. "In this position he can go to sleep and I can soar for hours on end. But I can hardly explain it, you have to see it."

>"So he sleeps on your back while you're up? I asked in amazement.
"Exactly" Nighthawk replied. "And I can wake him up by pulling a wire that is attached to him. I cannot explain it very well, but he stays warm because he is all covered in fur. And he cannot fall off, as he is tightly secured to the harness. But if necessary, he can go back to the steering position within a heartbeat. We have rehearsed this countless times."

>"Incredible! He loves you, Nighthawk, to do all this. Hiccup really is your Rider."
"Yes, he is. And I'm so glad that you ever more understand it. Understand him."

>"Yes, I do, my darlingâ€¦ So we can make night flights together! I can hardly wait!"<p>

Finally we left the highest peaks behind us. The mountains gradually got lower and we descended along. The sun had travelled with us and now stood in the sky ahead of us. We left the ice fields behind us and again flew over cold, green valleys. Ahead of us the sky brightened ever more, not the blinding whiteness that we had left behind, but sparkling in a way I had not seen before. A breeze that started out blowing quite erratically, developed into a stiff headwind. Ever more it carried a certain tang to it, an unknown smell.

Once we flew over the last row of mountain tops, there in the distance it was. The ocean. The last green foothills rolled down below us and beyond them an immense expanse of water stretched out. There was nothing else to be seen but this vast, silvery surface, mirroring the bright sky. You could not tell the horizon, as water and air blended together in the far distance.

We landed our tired bodies on a rather flat valley floor, still high up. I stood still gazing at the distant emptiness when Nighthawk approached me.

>"It... it looks like the end of the world" I blurted. "There is nothing there. Where is your island? Where is it, Nighthawk?"<p>

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- to be continued -

****Illustrations**:**

>On DeviantArt I found several drawings that correspond with the atmosphere in my stories, or even illustrate them.
To see a drawing of ****a little Night Fury being cross****, browse WhiteAspen on DeviantArt, click "Favourites and ****see the drawing "Toothless-dragon" by ~tetrapercu.****

9. The ocean

****Summary:******

>****Silverwings has been able to accept the fact that her lover Nighthawk has a close bond with a human. Through ups and downs she eventually is able to fully accept Hiccup. Nighthawk is overjoyed to meet his children. He reveals there is a company of dragons and humans nearby who, if she is willing to visit Berk, will carry her children.****

****She agrees to this, and the party departs for Berk. In the previous chapter they spend a night on the eastern side of the mountain range that separates them from the ocean, while the next day they fly over the mountains and reach the ocean. Silverwings settles in the routine of flying and gets to know the dragons better.******

>****She fondly recalls the night before the departure when she listened enraptured to Finnar playing the harp and singing a song of glory to Hiccup and Toothless. She is overwhelmed so much, that she needs a day to recover. While spending that day alone with Nighthawk and her children, she speaks out her wish to bond for life. It results in two dragons who couldn't be happier. ****

****A note on geography****: In my story the location of Berk corresponds with that of Iceland, though it is smaller. But it is only one (though the biggest) of several widespread islands. Sort of Iceland fragmented into an archipelago. A nearby island, Sont, is briefly mentioned in this chapter.

>Only recently I found out that the writer of the original HTTYD books, Cressida Cowell, based Berk on her impressions as a child of a small, uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland, which is far more south.<p>

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****Chapter 9. The Ocean****

****One day of rest****

>It was agreed that here, on the oceanfront, we would take one day of rest because the next stretch also was going to be a long flight: crossing the ocean to reach the first tiny islands would again take most of a day. That will be as hard on the yearlings as yesterday's flight over the mountains. After tomorrow the journey will become far more easy, something they call island-hopping. All in all, it is expected that we will reach Berk within three days.
Indeed, a long flight like yesterday's was almost too much for the yearlings. Last night they flopped down on my paws and softly sobbed their distress, too tired to do anything else. After a comforting wash from both their father and me they huddled tightly together, having missed one another too much.

But this morning they were their merry selves again. By midmorning we found a large tidal pool filled with sun heated water and now they were happily splashing around. Nighthawk and I rested on the rocks

between the pool and the ocean, with both of our tails dangling in the water. To my surprise there were no waves to be seen and yet the water of the ocean slowly rose and fell, rose and fell, pleasantly moving our tails.

>"It is called the 'breathing of the ocean'" Nighthawk told me "it seems to have a life of its own. This rising and falling of the water tells you that the land here falls away steeply." He continued smugly "If the land gradually slopes down you get surf."
"This is your world, dragon-of-the-sun-down-realm" I stated dryly, flicking an ear. I had to rely on him and his knowledge now and that didn't sit well with me yet.

>"Yes, this is my home, lady-of-the-taiga, the ocean, its islands and the sky overhead" he replied smoothly, lifting his tail and splashing me with water. Too lazy to retaliate I looked back at our tails.
"I am amazed at how clear the water is: you can clearly see our tails. The water of the lakes is murky or somewhat clear at best, but nothing like this. It is like another sky."

>He chuckled "That's a nice way to put it! And true, for when you hunt in it you kind of fly, using your wings. You should try that, Silverwings. Why don't you learn to swim today?"
"I'd like that! But not yet, I like to watch the children a bit longer."

We both watched them play in the pool. Earlier they had splashed around in the water, getting to know this new element. The way it hindered them in their speed, knocking their paws from under them, the way it lifted them up in the deeper part, the saltiness of it. Now they played in it, exploring everything, tugging at seaweed, stirring up crabs and other critters, chasing after tiny fish. Everything they found they showed to Nighthawk so he could name it: starfish, shrimp, clam... But even little prey sometimes comes at a cost and we had to free a yelping Boulder from a crab that pinched his nose.

>"They take to the water just fine, don't they" Nighthawk said "the way they are completely unafraid, the way their noses close when they dip their heads in. It's all there."
"It's all there" I agreed.

Nighthawk heaved a big sigh. "I love them so much, Silverwings. Their eager little bodies and sparkling eyes. Their wings, tails, little talons, all so neat and perfect. The way they differ in character already. And their smell, so sweet and light; one whiff makes my heart ache. They are so full of life and brave, Silverwings, but also so small and vulnerable. I'd wish to keep them under my wings so nothing can happen to them. And they accepted me completely and look up at me with total trust. It'sâ€¦| frightening. What did I ever do to earn that trust? Sooner or later I will fail them. What if -"

>His words were cut short by a lick of me over his snout.
"But -" he started again.

>An even wetter slobber over his nose made him sneeze and snap out of his worry. A goofy look crept over his face when he looked at me, ears perked up.
"I feel the same, my mate, but we're in this together now" I said.

>"Togetherâ€¦| that feels good. Solid." he concluded.<p>

"Now that you mention solidity, I have a hollow feeling inside. Could it be you forgot about the fish you promised me?" I asked him casually.

>"Could it be I forgot to mention you have to catch them yourself?" he countered smugly.
"You-"

>"Huh huh huh, you stay here" he said, getting up. "Wavedancer!" he

shouted to the male Nadder "Care to do some fishing?" To me he added "I nearly always hunt together with Wavedancer. Under water my steering is also a bit off, so I need him to give me a push in the right direction whenever I get in a current or something. I do hunt alone, but then I do not dive deep." Casting a last glance at the children he said "Maybe you should call the children out of the water: they start to shiver." Nighthawk was right, so I walked away from the ocean front and called them to me. Indeed they were shivering and felt cold to the tongue. But nothing a bit of heat couldn't cure. I decided a special treat was in order, and made them lie on my belly, so they basked in the heat from both my body and the sun. I had positioned myself so that I could watch the ocean. There the heads of Wavedancer and Nighthawk kept reappearing, and every now and then they flung a fish on the rocks.<p>

Suddenly Smasher, who was standing watch from the cliffs, barked an alarm. The little ones had just dozed off. _What!_ Carefully I rolled around. The yearlings slid onto the ground, mumbling protests. I looked in the direction the other dragons were focussed on: two specks coming straight at us, following the shoreline at high speed. Quickly I scanned around: nowhere to hide, just bare rock. Nighthawk and Wavedancer were under water. So I stepped over my children and assumed a fighting stance. I had not considered the other dragons, but to my surprise they surrounded me in a flash. The humans were also shouting, but I paid them no heed.

The specks grew into dragons. Would this be Thunderdrums? I had been told about these reclusive dragons. We had scanned around for them carefully, as the oceanfront is prime Thunderdrum territory. But no, they turned out to be Firehides, like Firestorm. At that moment I heard the voice of Nighthawk urging Wavedancer "Push me up, PUSH". The Firehides were not alone, as now we heard screams from humans riding them: "HEY. HEYAAH. We found you, Baldar. It's us, Yds and Eisse!"

>Dragons and humans alike relaxed instantly. "Nothing to worry about, Silverwings" Smasher said, turning to me "two young empty-skulls from Berk." Whom did he refer to, I wondered, to the dragons or the humans?<p>

By now they had landed and Baldar walked their way. "Sons of trolls, what are you doing here. Does uncle know you are here?" he scolded and gave them both a fair smack around the ears.

>"Uhuh, he thinks we're camping out on Sont. But we found it more interesting to look for your party. Is that the fabled dragoness?"
"Yes, and not one step nearer or she will tear your heads off. Don't mess with lady Silverwings. Or Toothless, for that matter. They are protecting their dragonets, so watch out!"

>The message didn't unphase them at all.
"Ha, good for you, Toothless. Hello there, beauty" one laughed.

>"So she's coming!" the other said "Berk is going to hear this nice piece of news and they are going to hear it from us. See you there!" With that they jumped on the Firehides again who leapt into the air. Stunned, we all watched them disappear. "Idiots" Baldar grumbled in his beard "but they'll manage. There's still time enough to reach the first islands before dark."
"Thank you" I said to the dragons "for protecting me. You said you wouldâ€¦ Thank you again." Hiccup placed the drowsy children on my belly again. I softly purred and soon they slept soundly.

That afternoon I learned to swim. That is, I became acquainted with

these waters. I had done some paddling and flap-swimming in the lakes while fishing, mostly when a dive for fish went wrong. But that had always been in shallow waters as I had avoided the deep. Nighthawk and I let ourselves sink down in this blue world. I watched him, the sunlight playing on his hide, casting ever changing patterns. I imitated his moves and before long I too shot through the water, though not nearly as gracefully as he. Wavedancer accompanied us, only needing to give Nighthawk a push every now and then. I can learn to do that too, I thought. I was mesmerised, both by the clarity of the water and the sun fracturing on the surface above us, and by Nighthawk 'flying' easily on his own, taking in his beauty.

>"Come, my love" I whispered to him once we took a breath of air "let's sink down once more and celebrate your world." Amazed, he followed me down. Slowly I moved around him, stroking his hide with the whole length of my body. He caught my drift and did the same to me. Slowly we danced, danced away into the blue

The uncommonly calm ocean made us decide to also give the yearlings their first real swimming experience. In the pool they had easily paddled in the deeper part so that should not be a problem once they were in deeper water. By now Nighthawk and I floated in the ocean while Wavedancer and Aura patrolled the deep to prevent any predator to shoot up from below. Everyone else had gathered at the water's edge to watch the spectacle.

>We called the excited yearlings to us. All but one readily plunged into the water once it heaved their way and let it carry them down. At once they started to paddle and soon reached their father's outstretched wings. Except for Pinecone. She nervously eyed the heaving water, pattering this way and that. But hearing all call out to her she began to clamber down the sloping rock, tail first, little talons gripping the slippery surface. I paddled as close as I could get and told her "Let go, sweetie, mammy is here." At that moment she lost grip and with a yelp tumbled backwards in the water. I quickly put my head under the thrashing yearling and rose up with her. She coughed and sneezed. "Hello there" I said "hold on to me." Together we simply rode the water for a while and it didn't take long before I felt her body relax. We watched her siblings paddle and dive, and heard them call to her. After some time she let go of me and paddled the short distance towards them. I swam behind her. Once she reached her father's wing and held on to it, I let myself sink down to watch my other children. Oh, the sight! There they flew. There my sweetlings flew, winging themselves this way and that in front of their father. They had taken to the water so easily. They are true children of your being, my love.

Tumble went the deepest, and he was the fastest of them all. He was also the first to come to me and together we rose.

>"I fly, mammy, did you see me? I fly, I fly" the happy thing wheezed out of breath.
"I saw you. Oh my son, you must be so happy! I know you want to fly so bad. I am so proud of you." I replied.

>Soon after that Nighthawk and I paddled back to the rocks, the children clinging to us, for a sudden chilling breeze picked up. We swam to where the humans were pointing and laughing and came to where Hiccup and Kjell sat. Kjell went on his belly and with his huge hands scooped up one yearling after another, until they all stood on land again, shivering from cold and fatigue. Moments later they lay snuggled on our bellies, the little males with Nighthawk. It was a special treat, after a special moment. Our wings were loosely wrapped around them, to shield them from the wind. With my head near to Nighthawk's, I heard Tumble babble on to his father and Nighthawk

grunt back to him. When his son finally had silenced, Nighthawk looked me in the eye and smiled "He is busy still, his wings twitch, even in his dreams he flies." I smiled back, enjoying the soft thump of three beating hearts.<p>

****A long day of flight again******

>By mid-morning the next day we were in the air above the vast emptiness of the ocean. It had become even windier than yesterday but luckily the wind was on our tail. I did not feel comfortable, flying in this emptiness. Ahead of us nothing was to be seen, not any sight of an island. Behind us the coast of the Mainland had all but disappeared over the horizon. Nighthawk spoke with me, sensing my discomfort. He assured me we were on the right track.

>"How can you be sure of that?" I asked him "when there is nothing to go by?"
"There are signs" he replied. "By night you steer by the stars just like you do when flying over land. By day, you steer by the sun and the patterns of the waves. You know, somehow the waves of the ocean bounce off islands and form patterns that you can read. You will learn how to read them, just like I learned the landmarks of your region."

"But mostly I use these" he added and wriggled the lowest little flaps. "Maybe you have never been aware of these. The more you have to depend on them, the clearer they tell you where you are. Aren't you capable of always finding a certain spot back?"

>"Yes" I replied "somehow I always know where I am. But I attributed it to the lay of the land."
"I am convinced that even now you would be able to find your way back to the nest without any help from us. What do you think?"

>I considered it, Nighthawk could be right.
"Why don't we try?" he said. And before I knew I flew behind him with eyes closed, following his lead by hearing. He made me circle around and after I lost all sense of direction he told me "Now, fly back to the Mainland."

With my eyes still closed I wriggled the little flaps and something became apparent, a 'feeling' that gave me direction. Soon I sensed the direction I had come from and I took that course. I opened my eyes and looked back over my shoulder: I flew in the exact opposite direction of all others. So indeed I would be able to find my way back! That boosted my confidence and no doubt exactly that had been the aim of Nighthawk. Somehow I had never been aware of the help from the little flaps, as I always flew by landmarks or by the stars.

For a time we flew in silence. During this time I tried to discern patterns in the waves below me, but look what I may, I did not see them. While studying the ocean's surface I suddenly saw a fountain of water spout up in the air. And another.

>"Look. Look! Sea dragons!" I exclaimed. "Look, there! Thundercloud is right: there are sea dragons that spout water instead of fire!"
My words were met by laughter. "Your Thundercloud knows a lot obviously from what you told us, but here he's wrong. Sea dragons do exist, but they are as rare as you Night Furies are, and they definitely spit fire like us" the dragons told me.

>"No" Sunrise added "these here are the arrluk, that the humans call whales. And what you see is the humid breath they exhale. Go over there quickly" the Nadder urged "they will soon dive as they do not like us dragons to hover over them."
Indeed, there they were, three of them, like enormous fish. They did as I had been told: they dove under, graciously, despite their vastness. The last I saw of

them was as they arched their mottled backs, finally lifting their flukes in the air before diving down.

>"They moan and wail" Wavedancer told me. "When you dive you hear the sounds they make and think they are near. But they aren't. They must be very loud, as loud as they are big."<p>

I was pleasantly surprised by it all. Today's journey was not as dull as I had imagined. It gave me much to think about. Though the children left me little peace. Especially Tumble called me again and again to him. "Mammy, can we go fly in the water again? Please, mammy, please?" I couldn't get across why that wasn't possible, and 'tomorrow' was too far away for consolation. So they started to mope again and all afternoon alternately whined or dozed. Poor things, tomorrow they will be able to play again.

During another time of quiet, I spoke in my thoughts to my brothers and to Thundercloud and shared my experiences. I did that every now and then and Nighthawk sometimes joined me. Thundercloud had introduced me to "the connection". In my memory I kept fresh the things he had said about it: "This is the way we Night Furies connect. If you touch me in love or care, you attach your strand of love to my being. The same with you, you can accept, or not, my strand of love to attach itself to your being. All strands are attached to one another like a spider's web. That connection spans the globe and keeps us Night Furies in touch, even though we are so rare."

>He told me that in the past we had been able to do something with that connection. "But even still, if you feel lonely, or hurt, you can seek out the connection. My experience is, some solace will come to you, it smoothes the rough edges of life. But also: when you are happy you can feed it into the connection, you picture the Night Furies you know and share with them your happiness or the solution to a problem. This way your happiness eases the burdens of other Night Furies, wherever they might be, even though you may never meet them."
Thundercloud had looked worried when he added: "It seems though that somehow the web is broken on several places and that there are young Night Furies, like yourself, without knowledge of it. Luckily the gifts from the Creator remained alive in you and you shared them generously with me. But there might be loner-Night Furies that are not so lucky."

>He had concluded his talk with a sudden passionate plea: "Do think about me sometimes, Happywings, my sweet. Please do and send me your thoughts."

>I had done so regularly, except for the years that my soul lay buried in misery like a toad in the mud during winter. But ever since I met Nighthawk I developed a wish to rediscover the potential of the connection, though I had no clue how. Maybe he and I together can find out something and pass it on, at least to our children, but maybe to other Furies. Maybe even restore some of the broken web.<p>

Because of the tailwind we arrived on the first island much sooner than estimated and, as the children dozed at the time, we decided to fly on to the next one. If the wind kept blowing favourably like this, it would shorten the journey considerably.

****A (too) warm welcome******

>Today is the last short day of flight. It will not take long before we reach Berk. During the last two days everybody had been cranky, suddenly fed up with travelling. Irritations flared and loud

snappy remarks were made, so much it intimidated the yearlings. They were subdued, silently peeking through the holes in their baskets. It should not have been a surprise to me but I had gotten too accustomed to dragons behaving friendly. It made it clear just how much cooperation there had been. Yet, despite the grumping and growling, all seemed to avoid a serious fight. Nighthawk told me that was the after effect of the war; nobody wanted to be at each other's throat anymore.

But this last day of the journey everyone is cheerful. Firestorm came flying next to me and told me that soon we would see some little islands. Once we reached those we should be able to see Berk, that is, if the weather is clear enough. I had become closer to the somewhat haughty Nightmare. She had finally given her speech the evening we reached the ocean. We watched the magnificent sight of the sun sinking down in the ocean in splendour, when suddenly Aura said "Firestorm, why don't you make your speech now? Isn't it a fine moment?" I liked the Nadder for that, because after the last failed attempt the Nightmare hadn't brought it up anymore. When the others also grumbled somewhat of an encouragement, she straightened herself. But when she put up a dignified face and opened her mouth, nothing came out. Flustered she whispered "I don't remember the words, I-ahâ€¦". While the others tried very hard not to laugh, she fumbled for words. But then suddenly she straightened herself and said decidedly "A Firehide will not fail a set task. Therefore, dear Silverwings, I wish to tell you how glad we all are that you come to visit Berk. On behalf of all the dragons on Berk I bid you a warm welcome." After giving it an additional nod, she sat down again. For a moment the other dragons looked stunned, then burst out "Hear, hear." "Best speech ever, Firestorm." "Especially the length of it! You should speak like this more often!" "Our compliments." >"Thank you, Firestorm" I said, a bit surprised at the sincerity I felt. But true, every dragon had done something to make me feel welcome. She had done it her way which is no less than any other's.<p>

Suddenly it had felt right to announce something of our own. I sought Nighthawk's eyes and found a confirmation there. >"Listen please, Iâ€¦ we, too have something to say to you." That quickly got the attention and I continued "I will not only be visiting Berk. Both Nighthawk and Iâ€¦ weâ€¦ I decided to stay. I will come to stay."
That announcement was met with cheer and the evening sky lit up with the fire of every dragon. Firestorm even set herself aflame. The humans all sprang to their feet in alarm, but Nighthawk 'talked' to Hiccup, so not much later they cheered along. It made Finnar unwrap his harp and play many a merry tune.

By now we had reached the row of little islands. Nighthawk came flying at my side. "We should be able to see Berk, now" he said to me. Hiccup and the other humans shouted to each other. But I didn't hear what they said because I peered into the distance to catch the first glimpse of Nighthawk's island. I strained my eyes and indeed I saw something, but it looked more like a cloud. A dark cloud, rising up, changing shape. "Nighthawk, what is that?" I asked him.

>"Maybeâ€¦ noâ€¦ yes-" he muttered. At that moment the dragons of our party began to cheer: "The dragons from Berk! It's the dragons from Berk! They come to welcome us."
"Hey, heyoooh" the humans yelled and laughed. "That's tons of dragons coming our way. Hope they don't knock us off, hahaha. Every dragon wants to be the first to set eyes

on Toothless' mate. Aren't the dragons a curious lot."
>"And what about the villagers! Bet half of the village is on
dragon-back."<p>

They approached us with speed. "Oh no" Nighthawk moaned "I hadn't expected this. They mean it as a welcome, butâ€¦" Quickly he tried to prepare the children "Don't be afraid, there are lots of dragons coming. They too are friends. Friends from Berk." But the children did not understand what he was talking about because they could not see them coming. I spoke to them also, but they sensed my rising tension and started to look frightened. At that moment the dragons swooped over us with a lot of noise and turned, swarming around us. The children shrieked in fear and tucked their heads in. Inside their baskets they continued screaming. They panicked and wanted to go into hiding but they couldn't huddle together and now felt all alone.

The unknown dragons crowded us and comments rained down on us.

"So you found her."

"You did it! You brought her!"

"Good for you, Toothless!"

"Welcome!"

"There she is!"

"Hello!"

"What a catch!"

"Welcome to Berk."

"Silverwings, isn't it?"

"_Lady_ Silverwings, we heard?"

"Congratulations, Blackwing."

Their noise battered my ears. The children screamed on. _They have to back away._ Before I knew, I growled around, then roared, but that had me out of breath in an instant.

>"Whoa, some voice! Seems to have a lot of grit. Hey, Toothless, are you sure she isn't too much for you?"
"Back off. BACK OFF.

Yearlings here" the dragons of our party screamed.

>"Keep your distance" Hiccup screamed. "You frighten the dragonets. You upset the dragoness." Nighthawk growled around too.
"Hey Blackspeck" one cried to Nighthawk "why the growl? Thought a mate would improve your manners. Ha ha, what a pair: Blackspeck and Grumpywingsâ€¦"

>"Oh, drop in the ocean, you moron" Sunrise snapped "if you don't clear away I'll land on your back, claws first, you hear! They're upset because of the children. Something wrong with your ears? Move away, you stupid log."<p>

He is right though, I thought. They fly out to welcome us and they find a dragoness that growls them away. No matter how unruly they are, that should not be their first impression. By now the dragons had given us more space. Though my head still rang and my heart

pounded, I called out to the nearest dragon "Hello, my name is Silverwings, what is your name?"

>"Sundance. I greet you Silverwings."
"I greet you too. So nice of you to welcome us. Sorry about the growling."

>Suddenly I got an idea. Yes, maybe this would snap the yearlings out of their fright. They had silenced but must be so afraid. "Listen to me, Fireweed, Boulder? This here is a Firehide. Tumble, Heather? Just like Firestorm. Pinecone? His name is Sundance. My sweetlings, don't be afraid anymore. They are all friends of your father and they came to say hello to us. My darlings? They were so loud, weren't they? But now they are not loud anymore. Boulder? Come have a look. Fireweed? Sweeties?"

>My talk also calmed myself. And it did the trick: little eyes appeared in the openings. Good.

I went on introducing myself to random dragons. Nighthawk joined me "Here's my love. My beauty! My Silverwings!" It gave a pang to my heart: beauty, the first thing he ever said to me. By now more dragons greeted us and peeked at the baskets. They cooed soft sounds to lure the little ones out. Again I spoke to my children "My sweetlings, why don't you say hello too? Stick your heads out and say hello?" And sure, the first head to appear was Heather's. She still looked bewildered, but obediently said "Hello".

>"That's my daughter, Heather" Nighthawk shouted.
"My, my. Skies and wings, a little Night Fury. Ain't that a darling. Oooh, look at that, she's grey. Little Furies are grey! Hello, sweetie!" the dragons exclaimed. Now three more heads popped out that shouted "ello-ello-ello-ello!" Pinecone shouted too, but from within the basket.

Suddenly Nighthawk cried "Look, Berk!" I glimpsed an island but didn't get a clear look, being surrounded by so many dragons. I hadn't been paying attention, but we had arrived.

>"Your island, we've arrived!" I shouted back at him. We swooped over it a first time, hearing shouts coming from below. A second time. Now all dragons except those of our party landed. We flew out over the ocean again, regrouped and turned around.
"Let's circle the village so everybody can see us." We did, and Nighthawk shouted out his joy. His rumbles and roars, and Hiccup's shouts, were met by one continuous cheer from below. I saw humans pointing, waving. They stood in between many large unnatural structures. _What are those?_ But I had no time for thought. I saw little humans running around yelling. _Children, human children._ Once more we took a wide turn over the ocean. _What are these large things floating on the water?_

>"The humans are happy to see us. Did you hear them cheer?" Nighthawk asked the yearlings. "Now it's your turn my children, cheer!"
They did, while we flew over the village once more, swooping up up to a higher meadow. There were two of these structures with humans in front of them. A burly male, a yellow-haired woman, and five children.

We landed and Hiccup dismounted, shouting "Astrid! Father! Children! She's here to stay. Silverwings is here to stay! And there are dragonets. Five DRAGONETS!"

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If you appreciate, please send me a review.

10. Young hearts meet

****Chapter 10: Young hearts meet****

Dear ****schoolgirl****, in chapter 5 you asked if any of Hiccup's children will bond with Toothless' kids. At that time I didn't know, as the plot was still developing. But look here, check it out! Hope you enjoy the result.

****Summary:**

>Silverwings has been able to accept the fact that her lover Nighthawk has a close bond with a human. Through ups and downs she eventually is able to fully accept Hiccup. Nighthawk is overjoyed to meet his children. Hiccup extends a formal invitation to her to come visit Berk. Travelling is made possible by a group of dragons and humans that carry her children in a basket. Silverwings agrees to this. Much moved by everything that passes, she speaks out her wish to bond for life, to which Toothless joyfully agrees.

****Having arrived at the oceanfront after a hard day's flight over the mountains, the group settles down for a leisurely day. Nighthawk teaches Silverwings and the children how to swim in the ocean. They are detected by scouts from Berk, who depart as quickly as they arrived to inform the island that Toothless is bringing his dragoness and offspring. They sure spread the word, because when the travelling group comes within eyesight of Berk, all dragons fly out to meet them, and the people of Berk cheer at their arrival. The group touches down in front of Hiccup's house, which is built next to Stoick's. Stoick, Astrid, Stormfly and the children all stand outside to welcome them.****

****oOoOoOoOoOo****

****Chapter 10. Young hearts meet****

****Hiccup's family**

>After landing I assessed the situation._ So this is Hiccup's nest. That yellow-haired woman must be Astrid, his mate. The huge male definitely is his father Stoick. And those are his children. That Nadder who is standing close to Astrid must be Stormfly._ I nodded a greeting to her. She nodded back and observed me with open curiosity. Then I watched how Hiccup managed only to take a few stiff paces before Astrid reached him and threw her arms around him. Their children swarmed them both, shouting "Daddy, daddy!" That word I didn't recognise, but it sure meant something most affectionate. I saw Hiccup and Astrid press themselves against each other. So human mates also need to feel each other's body, I liked that. I shot a glance at Nighthawk. He was looking over his shoulder and when I followed his gaze I saw the other dragons had landed too. The humans were dismounting and lowering the baskets.

My attention shifted again to the clamouring humans in front of me. A little behind the noisy bunch stood Stoick. I observed his bulk._ So huge, soâ€| strong. So utterly unlike his son!_ I could not break my gaze, the way he stood there, feet firmly planted on the ground, yet poised for action and ready to strike. It takes one predator to recognize another and realisation hit me this male is a seasoned dragon-killer. Meeting his eyes was like colliding into solid rock

and I could not suppress a shudder. Nothing there of the outgoing friendliness of the humans I had met so far. Reluctantly, I averted my eyes; a proper stare or even a stare-down would not be possible. This male would not budge and neither would I. It would get us straight into a confrontation, and I could not afford that to happen. From now on I had to play by yet unknown rules.

So this is Hiccup's father, and chief of his tribe. Suddenly alarmed, I thought: does that mean he is chief over me too? Why had I not thought of that before? The idea galled me at once. Nevertheless I had to do something to acknowledge this man of importance, so I looked into his eyes again and made a slight bow with the head. He returned the gesture with an ever so slight inclination of the head, without taking his eyes off me, without anything yielding in his gaze. I felt my back stiffen as aggression flared up; he was no bigger than a bear, and of them I made short workâ€¦
>He too measured me up with a cool, calculating look. Another surge of rebellion coursed through me. Oh yes, a WILD dragoness. A Night Fury originating from the WILDERNESS, what threat does she pose to the fine balance on your island! Another moment of thought made me realize exactly this is his task: assess possible threats to his tribe. With an effort I battled my aggression down. Did I not do the same, to protect my children? The thing that stung me however was the authority he radiated. I was my own master and intent on keeping it that way.

Deliberately I took my eyes off him and looked for Nighthawk. He sat close by, watching the unloading of our children. He was smiling, happy to be home. I looked back to Hiccup and his family, only to be surprised that this time they were all staring at me. Immediately my ears flattened and I stepped back, much to my annoyance.
>"Don't be shy, Lady Night Fury" Astrid said to me.
Shy? Who's shy! Annoyed, I flicked my wings, but she had already turned and swiftly walked over to Nighthawk. Stroking his neck, she said "She is beautiful, Toothless, as beautiful as you are. I am so happy for you." Nighthawk snorted and gave her a playful push. The children crowded Nighthawk too, shouting "Hello Toothless! Hello, hello!"

>Astrid's remark and the obvious display of affection took me by surprise. You are much loved, my darling. They say you are beautiful, so they noticed! That's niceâ€¦| nice indeed. It made them rise in my opinion.

Hiccup gave them a warning though: "Please keep your distance from the dragoness. She is very much on edge! She lived a solitary life and the dragons swarming her was a bit much. She is not like Toothless or the dragons here. You have to get to know her better first. You know, why don't we show them to their new house first, and make further introductions later. That way they can settle a bit."

>That was a great relief, to have a little time to ourselves first.<p>

****Young hearts meet**

>By now I felt a yearling wriggle against my side. Immediately I put my wing over it and lowered my head to see who it was. I had only established it was Tumble when an exited scream made my head fly up again. It was Hiccup's youngest child, a little female by the looks of it.

>"Babies, babies!" it cried out, jumping up and down "Toothless, your

babies!" Toothless beamed, but also looked around to me and tossed his head.
"Oh, and of your dragoness of course. I'm sorry" the little human added quickly.

>The yearlings had all fled under my wings by now, except for Fireweed. Once she reached my paw, she looked back at the loud little creature and hissed at it. The child started, but then a broad smile lit up its face. "Oh, mommy, daddy, I like that one. It's so brave! Is it a boy or a girl?" Facing Fireweed again, she shouted "I like you. I like you!"<p>

Fireweed watched the child in astonishment. Her head rose and her ears perked up. When she looked at me confused, I repeated to her "She likes you, my daughter."

>"She **LIKES** me" Fireweed echoed. Digesting the fact, her eyes started to shine. Being proud and fierce, she was not as readily liked by humans as easy-going Heather or sweet, shy Pinecone.
"That is Fireweed, Kari" Hiccup said. "Her name is Fireweed." Both Hiccup and Astrid looked at their child with amusement.

>"A girl like me!" Kari uttered delighted, and she waved her hand at Fireweed. But then her hands closed over her mouth in sheer amazement when Fireweed sat down on her haunches, met Kari's gaze and made a wave-motion back with her front paw.<p>

Nighthawk approached us and nudged his daughter "Why don't you go over to Kari and greet her? Hiccup just told his family to not approach us, so it's up to us."

>Fireweed hesitated, then took a few steps, ears and wings alert. Kari also took a step, but Hiccup stayed her. "Let her come to you at her own pace. And don't grab her or anything" he told her.
The child went on her knees and held out one hand, asking "Will you come to me, Fireweed? Please, please?"

>Fireweed cautiously advanced, sniffing the air.
"Oh Toothless" Kari sighed, briefly looking up at the dragon she had known all of her life. Then she looked back at Fireweed who pattered ever closer. Fireweed studied Kari's expectant face and the hand in front of her. Then, with a flick of her wings, she craned her neck, closed her eyes and put her nose against Kari's fingertips.

>Next to me Nighthawk gasped. "It's almost how I touched Hiccup for the first time" he breathed while sharing a meaningful glance with him.
Fireweed opened her eyes, pulled back a bit and, after another look at Kari's radiant face, shot under my wing too.

****Our new home**

>We were setting off to the 'new house' when Kari approached Nighthawk and asked in an expectant voice "Toothless, can I ride on your back?"

>The child was unpleasantly surprised when Nighthawk shook no and turned his back on her to have a look at the yearlings under my wing.
"Little starfish" Hiccup said "Toothless has changed. He is a daddy too now, just like me. He has to take care of Lady Silverwings and his own children. That is the first thing on his mind now."

>"Butâ€| butâ€| will he never let me ride him again?" she stuttered, much disappointed.
"Well, not today" Hiccup said. "But you know what? You ride on my back and we both will bring Toothless and his family to their new home. â€|Oww, you've grown since I left, you're getting heavy" he puffed when he hoisted the child up. Again I wondered at how amazingly balanced humans are on only two legs when Hiccup walked with his daughter riding on his shoulders, leading the way up a steep slope towards a forest.

Why do we walk to a forest? And what exactly is 'a home'? I wondered. So I asked Nighthawk.

>"It's a house, like the wooden structures you have seen" he explained. "It's like a cave, a place to call home. We started to build one in the woods about a moon before we set off on our journey to the Mainland. I wish we could have gotten a real cave, but all caves on Berk are already occupied. I myself have been living a little distance into the forest, with a delightful tree to hang from. In winter I stay in Hiccup's house, in an annex with an extra entrance so I have my own corner."
He continued "For our home we cleared a patch of forest this spring. It is on a gentle slope facing south behind a rocky outcrop that shields us from the prevailing winds. We made it in a cave-like shape. It's not completed yet as Hiccup thought you might have ideas about how it should be finished."

>Hiccup, how thoughtful of you, and again you show how clever you are. A home among the trees, not in the village! I like that so much!
The whole thing moved me. It spoke of so much hope, while there was no certainty at all that I would agree to come. What if I had refused you? It makes me feel so special, Nighthawk, so welcomeë| _And I shot him a grateful look.

Up the slope we went, until we entered the forest on a well-used track. While walking, my thoughts went back to Hiccup's children. They had me perplexed for a moment as they were all of different height and coloration, unlike my children. But then of course they were of different ages, because humans only lay one egg at a time. It was obvious they had traits from both Hiccup and his mate, except for one young male that had the looks and build of Hiccup's father. Kari had brown hair like Hiccup's but my guess was she did not have his mellow temper.

My yearlings definitely delighted her. Riding on her father's shoulders, Kari looked down on them, how they hopped in between Nighthawk and me. "Oh, look at the babies, daddy, they are so cute. And I recognise Fireweed already, it's that one" she said.

>"You think they are cute?" Hiccup replied "Kari, you know dragonets and these are as fierce as their parents."
"Fierce? she asked in amazement "Is the dragoness that fierce? Because Toothless isn't fierce at all."

>"YOU haven't seen Toothless being fierce. He decided a long time ago to be friendly to us, and he has always been to you, but that doesn't mean he isn't fierce, my daughter. I have seen him aggressive and then you'd want to hide under the nearest stone! Don't underestimate him or the dragonets. Your cute little Fireweed has bitten Haldis. She's quite something."
The child was undaunted though and for a moment there was a glimmer of admiration in her eyes, before she pulled a straight face again.

I relished being in a cool forest again, but it differed much from the taiga-forest that I am accustomed to. It was denser, the trees were thicker and many carried foliage instead of needles. We had not even walked that far when we took a turn to the right and continued down a newly made path which soon gave way to a clearing. The soil of the clearing was freshly turned up, though here and there patches of grass had grown. The trees that had been taken down were nowhere in sight. Even most of the stumps had gone, though a few with flattened tops remained.

The thing that caught my eye immediately though, was a large wooden structure, set against the slope. Words fail me to describe it, as I do not know human-made structures. But there was a wooden floor, slightly raised from the ground, and wood to three sides and over it. It was cave-like in that the inner space would stay dry. Delighted I hopped inside to find enough space for us all. Overhead a stout pole had been placed so Nighthawk could hang down from it, something he likes more than I do. Nighthawk, nervously hovering near, had started to rattle "â€|maybe we line the floor with slabs of stone so we can build a fire in winter because we have to be very careful lest we burn the house down and Thump will come to build a nest that is if you want to, but you can also do it yourself or I help you of course or make one for you I mean but we already gathered a pile of moss and-" A slobbery lick from me silenced him and I purred my delight. "It looks like it will work, Nighthawk. It's cave-like and it looks fine to me" I said, which made him utter a sigh of sheer relief.

We both sat down and looked out from the house. Facing us sat the yearlings, gaping at the wooden structure. Hiccup and Kari stood some distance away, watching us.

>Looking around, I raised my wings in joy. "Forest! We will live among the trees, like at homeâ€| uhm, like back in the taiga" I corrected myself. Nighthawk shot me a quick glance, and then suddenly hopped out. He stepped away a couple of paces, gave me a glittering look, andâ€| burned a circular patch of soil. A bed! Sizzling ground! Irresistible! I took a leap and landed flat on my belly in the middle of it. The heat slammed against my scales - _aahh_ - and I relished digging my talons into the ground, raking the soil. Then I rolled over on my back and extended my wings to catch the wonderful heat, my wriggling body pressed against the fresh-hot embers. I heard laughter, Hiccup and his daughter were laughing out loud at my antics. I got up, made a jump at Nighthawk and chased him around with a playful growl. After another lap though, Nighthawk turned like lightning and slammed me to the ground. I seriously need to learn some of his tricks! Sniffing my hide, covered in ash, he said "You smell terrific, love. You have the smell of Berk all over you now. Welcome home, Silverwings, my darling. Let's be happy here."

>In answer, I raised my head to the sky and shot up a purple blast of fire.<p>

****Late that nightâ€|**

>I woke up, sensing something was wrong. In the dim light of predawn I scanned around me. Nothing out of the ordinary. Then I looked into the makeshift nest of moss: four, only FOUR yearlings there! Panic struck me and I leapt to my feet: Fireweed was missing! Nighthawk woke with a start. "Fireweed" I gasped. One glance in the nest was enough for him. "You stay here with the children, I go look for her" and off he was.

I saw him search around and sniff. Suddenly he seemed to pick up her scent and, nose to the ground, he disappeared from view. I stayed behind and tried to be as silent as possible with my heart hammering in my chest, as the other children were still asleep. From a distance I heard soft calling growls from Nighthawk. _Why don't you call out loud?_ Then it went silent. My heart skipped a beat. I was at the point of roaring out myself, when Nighthawk returned with Fireweed on his back. In a quick trot he neared the house.

"Mammy" the little thing sobbed. She shivered from head to toe. "In

my wings, quickly" I said and immediately rolled onto my side.
>"I found her in a tree halfway Hiccup's house" Nighthawk whispered to me. "I called and she answered me. I saw her trail in the dew laden grass and then I had her scent."<p>

The little one in my wings gave a soft whimper. Her shivering lessened. But then she said "I've been so bad" and started to wail loudly. Now the other children also woke up, looking drowsy and confused. "Yes, you have been disobedient and you did a dangerous thing, walking out all alone" I told her. But I opened my wings so Nighthawk could lick her for comfort. He washed her limp body until she stopped crying. Then we put her back in the nest, together with her brothers and sisters who looked at her stunned.

"Why did you leave the nest, Fireweed? You must tell mammy and me" Nighthawk told her.
>"Iâ€¦ I woke up" she answered "and then I thought of Kari. And then I wanted to see her so bad. And then I walked. And then I heard something. And then I got afraid. And then I climbed in a tree."
So she had wanted to see Kari! Worried, I looked over to Nighthawk, who nodded solemnly.

But then a movement on the path caught our attention. There, just outside the tree line, in a thin wrap that fluttered in the night breeze, stood Kari. She clearly did not dare to take one more step and stood there like frozen.
>"Kari! Kari!" Fireweed called to her, eyes wide and ears perked up. Bewildered we looked from one child to the other.
Nighthawk said "I will get her. But then I must go and fetch Hiccup." So he went to the child, made her mount him and brought her in. The child shivered, and not only from the cold, as she looked terrified.
>"Can you keep her warm, dear? I have to get Hiccup. Will you please wrap her in your wings? She has lain in mine, so she knows" Nighthawk said before he bounded off.<p>

But not in mine, I thought. Irritated, I threw my wing around the child and rolled onto my side. I sensed she didn't dare to move a muscle, and I also lay stiff and unmoving. She was cold indeed, especially the feet as she didn't wear any foot wraps.
>I could spit some fire on them, I thought moodily. _Is this what living on Berk will be about? Humans approaching our nest at any odd time?
>"Mammy?" The voice of my daughter snapped me out of my thoughts. I looked over to the nest where my children still gaped at me speechless. But Fireweed asked "Can I go to Kari, please mammy? She is afraid."
>Bewildered, I nodded a yes. Fireweed hopped out of the nest and slipped into my wings. Kari relaxed at once. Then I felt them both wriggle and a bit laterâ€¦ heard them giggleâ€¦ they were giggling! Seriously! I did not know what to do anymore. I wanted to say something to my other children that gaped at the slight movements within my wings, but I was at a loss for words.<p>

Luckily Nighthawk rushed in with Hiccup riding his back. It suddenly annoyed me. _What are you, a beast of burden? _Yet relieved I opened my wings. Hiccup went on a knee, picked up his daughter and gathered her in his arms. "Thank you, Silverwings" he said.

"Kariâ€¦ whyâ€¦" he addressed the child "what were you thinking, child. There could be wolves around!"

>The child's face fell. "Sorry daddy. Iâ€|"
>While putting his outer fur around her and sitting her down on his lap he continued "And what were you thinking approaching a dragon's nest like that? Toothless will be mad at you."
>"Toothless?" she asked surprised. She looked up at her old friend, only to find him staring back at her with a stern face. That shocked her and her voice shook when she asked him "Toothless, don't youâ€| love me anymore?"
>When Nighthawk still did not yield, she burst into tears.
>"Child, did I not teach you the proper respect for dragons?" Hiccup asked.
>"Yes, daddy" the child sobbed.
>"Toothless is unhappy with you now and he has a right to be. This is his family and his house. You disturbed their peace."<p>

But he stroked her head which calmed her down. In a softer voice he asked "Just tell me now, why did you leave the house? I don't understand."
>"Iâ€| I woke up. And then I thought about Fireweed. And I wanted to see her so much, just toâ€| toâ€| So I went out. And then-"
>Suddenly she looked down. There was Fireweed. Unbidden she had crept near and had placed her paw on Kari's foot, looking up at her. I saw Hiccup and Nighthawk gaze at each other and again share a meaningful glance before they both turned their heads to me. But understanding had dawned already. My heart started to pound and thoughts tumbled through my head, while the child continued to speak. Are they bonding? Is this bonding? But howâ€|? And so quick? Fireweed, my wild, wilful child? Why she? Howâ€|?

Hiccup's voice snapped me back. "So you care much about Fireweed, my daughter?"
>"Yes daddy" she answered, raising her eyes to meet father's, smiling shyly.
>"If that is so, then you also have to care for her well-being and for the well-being of her family. And that includes having respect for the peace of their house."
>"Yes, daddy", the child answered in a small voice, adding "I am sorry, daddy."
>Hiccup added softly "You need to apologise to Toothless and Lady Silverwings, don't you think?"
>The child nodded and approached us with a red face. Hands fumbling the thin cloth, she said "Toothless, Lady Silverwings, I am sorry to have disturbed you." She fumbled some more, looked at me and added "And thank you for keeping me safe and warm."
>That surprised me. So the child understood now, and had made a proper remark all by herself. It made me look at her twice. Nighthawk, satisfied, gave her a little lick on which the child instantly threw her arms around his neck.

Rising to his feet, Hiccup said "You have done a dangerous thing, leaving the house all by yourself. But your mother and I will speak about it in the morning. First you have to go back to bed. It's far too early."
>Nearing her father again, the child asked hesitantly "Areâ€| are you mad at me, daddy?"
>"Well, let me tell you here and now" Hiccup said to his daughter in a stern voice "you know how dangerous the forest is, especially at night. But you never thought of that before going out."
>"No, daddy" the child answered, her shoulders falling.
>"You are never to leave the house like this again. And if you ever feel the urge, you come to me and wake me up."
>"Yes, daddy."
>"You are forbidden to go to Toothless' house or anywhere near. And you will go to the fish distribution every day for

this entire week to clean up and scrub the place." At that her head hung even lower.

>"And after that you will return home straight away and help me carry a heavy basket full of fish to Toothless and his family."
At that her head jerked up, only to quickly try and resume her demure posture.

>I couldn't help but smile on the inside: This way the child learned she had done something wrong, but at the same time she would visit us under the guidance of her father. How very clever.
Turning to face us Hiccup said "Thank you again, Toothless and Silverwings." He then lifted the child in his arms and walked away.

"Fireweed, back into the nest" I heard Nighthawk say while I gazed after Hiccup. Just before he disappeared in the trees, Kari looked back over his shoulder. I followed her gaze and saw Fireweed looking back at her, wings twitching, before she flopped down on the moss.

>I went over to her. "Mammy-" Fireweed started, but I pinned her down under my paw. The humans have their way of disciplining, but this is mine: restraining them, letting them feel who is on top. The weight takes the fight out of them and they know I will not take my paw away until they surrender. But all the same the pressure is reassuring, I remember that of the time when I was punished by my mother.
Through my paw I felt the tension in my daughter's body. But as always there was no resisting the pressure, and her body slowly slacked. "Shh, my child, go to sleep now" I told her and shoved her over to her siblings. "Close your eyes, all of you" I told them and went to licking every one of them to make them go to sleep.

While I watched Fireweed finally fall asleep I thought: so the humans discipline their children too, that's good. And it had been such a relief that Nighthawk had put us first in his thoughts and actions, and had not yielded to the child's plea. I had not realised it had worried me, until I felt relief from this realisation.

>I looked at him as he sat at the front of our house, upright, silently gazing up to the pale sky. No, all those years among humans had not bent him around, however friendly he is towards them. Suddenly I realised that this applies to me too: I don't have to give myself away. Living with humans does not necessarily have to lessen you as a dragon.<p>

When I looked back at Fireweed once more I felt a pang in my heart. _Why you, my daughter? My beautiful, fierce daughter. Of all my children I had thought you at least would eventually reject living on this island and return to the Mainland to continue living in the ways of old. And now you have bonded. What will that bring you?_

Quietly I went over to sit beside Nighthawk. He gave me a small nudge and put his wing over me. "It is not all bad, Silverwings, though you may think soâ€| For me it is different, I have been through this. I am surprised; in a way pleasantly surprised even. But Fireweed, with her characterâ€| And Kari, with her mother's temper, who is a bit spoiledâ€| We will not encourage our daughter, but we must guide herâ€| and we will, you and I."

>This speech made me feel better and in silence we sat together until we dozed off.<p>

oOoOoOoOo

To be continuedâ€¦|

11. Gunna and Berk's legacy

****Chapter 11: Gunna and Berk's legacy****

****Summary:**

>Silverwings has been able to accept the fact that her lover Nighthawk has a close bond with a human. Through ups and downs she eventually is able to fully accept Hiccup. Nighthawk is overjoyed to meet his children. Hiccup extends a formal invitation to her to come visit Berk. She agrees to this and travelling is made possible by a group of dragons and humans that carry her children in a basket. Being very moved by Nighthawk's love and all that has passed, Silverwings finally speaks her wish that they mate for life.

****Flying over land and a mountain range they reach the ocean. Scouts from Berk spot them and herald the news that Nighthawk is bringing his dragoness to the island. Within eyesight of Berk the travelling group is welcomed by a swarm of dragons from Berk. After a brief meeting with Hiccup's family they go to the house that is prepared for them. It is not in the village, but some distance into the woods, much to Silverwing's delight. Late that night it happens that both Fireweed and Kari, Hiccup's youngest daughter, leave the safety of their homes to go look for the other. It becomes clear why: they are drawn to each other so much, it must be bonding.****

A/N: I chose to go by the name of 'Gunna' instead of Gothi, as my wise-women-character differs too much from the movie-one. But in looks she is the same.

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****Chapter 11. Gunna and Berk's legacy****

****Breakfast**

>_My children are playing, I hear them laugh and chatter. Haha, they are such a happy bunch, my sweetlings. Butâ€¦| those are not their voices, whatâ€¦|?*

>"Careful, she's waking upâ€¦|"

>*Whatâ€¦|?*
_I sprang to my feet and roared around. That is until some realisation of the situation sank in and the roars died in my throat. My yearlings were out playing with whatâ€¦|? Hatchlings of the Gronckle kindâ€¦| Thump was there and a female Gronckle, halfway the glade. More to the side were Sunrise and Stormfly, Astrid's Nadder. In between they and I sat Nighthawk, looking a bit lost. "Uhm, dear..." he started apologetically, but another voice cut him short.

>"My, my, not exactly a morning type, are you? Good morning to you and sorry, the party started without you. You know, we just couldn't keep away. Thump here wanted to bring his mate and hatchlings so bad. And I was just plain curious, you see." I saw it was Stormfly speaking, and now she walked toward me together with Sunrise.<p>

At that same moment Boulder and Tumble raced past me "Mammy, mammy, look, hatchlings", immediately running back to the three Gronckle hatchlings. There, playing with them were my other children, including Fireweed. It was mid-morning now. I figured I had fallen

asleep again after the events late this night! "Mammy" Heather cried "they are so young, they cannot even speak yet! But -_ump_- they BUMP, hihhi, -_ump_-_ohh_-, hihhi." Still not fully awake I watched stunned as my children let the hatchlings chase them around and bump into them. They in turn did their trick of flipping them over, but that didn't work so well on these hatchlings, as they rolled on and immediately stood on their chubby feet again.

"Haha, shut your jaws dear and brighten up. Never thought a Night Fury could look that unintelligent" Sunrise laughed. "We decided to give you a hard time. Aaand bring you breakfast. The Nadder cocked her head "That is, you overslept and it's all gone. Hahaha, just teasing. This here is-

>"Stormfly" I blurted "one of the Heroes."
"Correct" Stormfly replied "as is Thump's mate, here. But better not mention that to her. She tries to forget the past. Nice to meet you."

>I summoned up some dignity and replied "Greetings to you, Stormfly, my name is Silverwings".
"Hah- only half awake and formal already. Couldn't be anything else than a Night Fury" she replied, and, facing Nighthawk: "Oh, Toothless, cheer up! It's not like we're going to eat her. That is, about breakfast -Meatlug?" she called over to Thump's mate.

The female Gronckle came walking over.

>"I am Meatlug, dear" she said "nice to meet you. Sorry about Thump, he just dozed off."
"Silverwings. Greetings to you M! Me!"

>"Meatlug. I was aptly named by my human, Fishlegs, who recognised my potential even back when I was no more than skin and bones. Uhm, we tend to say 'our human', Silverwings, but that's only a matter of speech. Surely you must have been told already it is too cumbersome to say 'the human I bonded with' all the time."
Before I could even think of giving a reply she prattled on "I am just so very happy with my human. He is of a healthy girth, and he is an incredibly nice and caring human person. And he knows so much, all this knowledge in him, it's great! Him talking away, while massaging my feet, is the best way to fall asleep!" She paused, lost in some fond memories which I did not dare to break into.

>I took the opportunity to briefly look over to Nighthawk, who had settled, and gave him a silent greeting before returning my attention to the Gronckle female.<p>

"But where are my manners" Meatlug said, pulling herself together. She sat upright solemnly and respectfully, before barfing up a pile of fish.

>What honour and generosity! My ears flew up in surprise. Not just one half of a fish, following etiquette, but a whole pile of them! I didn't quite know how to react.
Seeing my amazement, Meatlug replied "It's a bit of a combination between welcoming you and providing breakfast. Please honour it and eat your fill. Though it's only half of what we brought. The other half is inside my mate, and he is digesting it right now, I fear."

The whole thing was yet again an intrusion on our privacy, but I had promised myself firmly to take things as they came and desensitize.

>So I respectfully gobbled up the fish, while half listening to Meatlug babbling on: "You definitely could use some decent food to put up weight dear, you look so, uhm! petite! in an elegant way of course! No offence! But a bit more fat would give your mate

something to hold on to." I kept my peace. I never thought anything about my weight and decided to not start today. She continued "Oh, the journey must have been horrific: all that flying around without enough rest to let the food settle. My mate came back all skinny, I will have to fatten him up again, my poor darling" and she gave her mate an affectionate stare. "I hope this experience cures him of any further wish for adventure".
I looked over to the bulky form of Thump, who was snoring off a heavy breakfast and mumbled something noncommittal.

However, she wouldn't let the subject rest; the sight of her poor mate and of me must have struck a deep cord. "You know, let me advise you about the fish, so you can choose the best ones for your children, poor skinny things. -Oh, sorry, no offence" she quickly added when I stopped eating and gave her a glare. A bit less self-assured she continued "It's just, I cannot imagine how this journey must have affected them. My motto is 'nest and rest' in order to build up steadiness and a clear mind. Uhm, well then" she said, poking through the pile of fish "here you have salmon, and that one is a mackerel. Those are the fatty ones that will put some meat on the bones. I hope you take my advice, as Toothless sadly seems to prefer cod, choosing taste over nourishment. It was nice for him as a lone dragon, but it won't do for raising children. You as a mother should realise it's a lean fish, you know. â€|Ahh, you have finished already? Your stomach must have shrunk dear, but I'm happy to say I've got the perfect solution for leftovers. -Childrenâ€|" she called over to the playing bunch "we have some food left, how about that!" In no time her little ones were happily munching away what was left of the fish.

"Thank you so much for the food, Meatlug" I said to her "and for the advice. And I am still thankful to your mate who had the wisdom to build us a nest when we were out in the open. Will you please tell him that? Your kind does a great job with building nests."
>"Yes, he is quite something, isn't he" she sighed happily, looking back at Thump, who had rolled over with all fours up in the air.
"I'll go join him and leave you to your rest. -Childrenâ€|?" And she hobbled off to her mate with her children wobbling behind, followed by my curious yearlings. The Gronckle hatchlings had become sleepy by now. One didn't make it all the way. It slowed, rolled over and fell asleep on the spot. My children approached it cautiously and prodded it gently. When the hatchling did not wake up they settled themselves in a protective ring around it, looking all smug and alert except for Fireweed, who's head sank down when she too succumbed to sleep.
I smiled at them. _My sweeties. You must suddenly feel so grown, for the first time meeting little ones younger than yourselves. _

"Leave protection to Night Furies, even this young, it seems. You have to give them that" Sunrise remarked, one eye resting on the yearlings. "Why don't you and Nighthawk take a tour of the island, Silverwings" she continued "I'll keep an eye on the little ones here together with Aina, until you return. She will be here any moment. Go fetch Hiccup and jump in the air."

****Food and freedom**

>Together with Stormfly we trotted down to Hiccup's house. Nighthawk told me he already had a stiff talk with the children about last night, speaking with them about the dangers of going off alone. But he had not talked much about the reason why Fireweed had left the nest and soon released them, as all five longed to go out and play.

He told me the tree stumps were an absolute favourite; they climbed on top and then defended their 'nest' to the others. I smiled at him, happy with his developing parenting skills.

"You will not see Stoick today" Stormfly told us "he went into the great hall to start preparations for the welcoming feast for you, Silverwings. Berk will give the mate of Toothless a warm welcome of course. A GRAND welcome I may add, set for the day after tomorrow." When she noticed the look on my face she added with a smirk "And after that you can go hide in the woods for as long as you like. But not before all of Berk had a good look at you and your yearlings. We have our 'formalities' too, dear. Hahaha. Just let the whole thing wash over you and satisfy the curiosity of everyone. We haven't had a major celebration for ages, so your arrival is the perfect excuse to have one."

>"Did you know that?" I asked Nighthawk uncertainly.
"No, but I should have guessed. How stupid of me." He shook his head, but then a little smile crept on his face and he suddenly perked up. "Yes, why not. Why not celebrate!" he exclaimed. "Humour me in this, my love, let me show you off to all of Berk. I am so proud of you, I could shout!"

Once at Hiccup's house we met his family and this time we made formal introductions. I looked into Astrid's laughing eyes, and even went so far as to somewhat stiffly lean over and let her pat my head. "Thank you, Silverwings" she said. "Hiccup told me you used to live a solitary life. Hopefully things are not too difficult for you. But I am glad you came, you and your dragonets. Sorry about the disturbance early this morning though, we will make sure it does not happen again." At seeing my eyes search around for Kari, she added "We put Kari back to bed, she fell asleep during breakfast. Shall I introduce you to the other children?"

So she did. The oldest, a twelve-year old male was called Stoick, after Hiccup's father. He was a willowy yellow-haired male that already was as tall as his parents. Their second child had a complicated name, but they repeated the name Valla to me. She was a slender female of 11 that looked much like her mother, apart from the colour of her hair-pelt, which was brown. Their third child should better have been called Stoick, as he had the stocky build and red hair-pelt of his grandsire, but his name was Sunnar, a nine-year old male. Then there was Brennan, a little male of seven. He was like Hiccup in miniature, up to the bright intelligence in his eyes. And Kari, they told me, was five years old.

>I sniffed every one of them while they, on instruction of their father, tightly pressed their hands together so they wouldn't touch me. I was pleasantly surprised by the sweet smell of their young bodies beneath the smelliness of their clothing-wraps. Carried away somewhat, I snuffled on for quite a while. I was just giving the youngest male a little lick, when suddenly something shuffled behind my back.<p>

WHAT. Something sneaking up on me!

>Instantly outraged, I swung around with a growl and pounced on the source of the noise, knocking it flat. NOTHING sneaks up on me like that. Nothing had, for most of my life. My teeth unsheathed and I was about to plunge them into my prey, when I realised the shrieking thing was a human. Just in time I managed to curb my attack, so my snout slammed into the ground next to his head. I rolled over to the side to get off and once on my feet, leapt even further away.

Aborting the attack did nothing to satisfy my killer instinct though. Growling, I tore at the grass with my talons, ripping loose whole chunks, to drain off the energy.
Nighthawk had come stumbling after me, having just missed me when trying to knock my head away. He came standing in between me and the screaming humans. When I finally hung my head, he nuzzled my face gently. It made me lay down. He lay down too, still blocking my view. After I gave a final snort, he said "I think that will be the last human to startle you. Word will spread quickly that one better not sneak upon a certain dragoness". His dry remark made me look up to him. "That was Snotlout, Hiccup's relative" he added "maybe he'll finally take Hiccup's warnings to heart."

Lifting my head, I looked over to the humans. Next to Hiccup the human Snotlout hung pale faced against the house. Astrid stood in the doorway, the children peeking around her with big frightened eyes. Hiccup observed us.

>"Nighthawk, what if -" I started.
"Hush. You didn't" he cut me short.

>"I want to be away from here, let's go back" I said.
"Better not walk away from this, dear, if you will take my advice. The villagers have been scared stiff by dragons before, back when we got accustomed to each other. And Snotlout should have known better than to startle you. Let's wait this out."

Snotlout finally walked off, on wobbly feet. Hiccup called his children to him and spoke with them. Kari stepped out of the house too, obviously woken up by the noise. After a talk of their father the children looked over at me less frightened and went into the house with their mother.

Hiccup disappeared for a moment and then returned with the flying harness. "Come Toothless, Silverwings. Let's fly."

>"Silverwings" he added while putting the harness on Nighthawk "things will work out. It has for all dragons, it will for you too. You'll see. Let's fly and feel the wind. It will make you feel better."
Hiccup had been right, once up in the air it was nice to feel the breeze. As nice as his speech had been. I deeply inhaled the fresh air and nodded at Nighthawk relieved.

First of all we made a swoop over the village and I saw how it lay on an outcrop of rock into the ocean. The rest of the island was much bigger, Nighthawk told me. We flew past a spike of a mountain. "There" Nighthawk said "that patch of forest over there, that's where Hiccup found me, all tied up. When we flew over a cove next, I knew what that was. But I didn't want to land yet, as I wished to learn the general lay of the land. To my satisfaction much of it was like the taiga I came from, though the forest was denser. There were also glades, some with heather and shrubs, and others grassier. On one of those I saw deer. Deer!

Immediately I landed to go and hunt one. But Nighthawk landed also and stopped me. "What is the matter?" I asked surprised. He then told me that the dragons on Berk did not hunt for deer. He explained to me "Even if every dragon would only take one deer a year, there soon would be no deer left." And he added another piece of information: "You also better not taste the round, fluffy animals that are called sheep. As long as you do not taste them, you do not crave them. The sheep are for the humans, who need the wool to make clothes, as they lack scales or pelt." Unbelieving, I looked Nighthawk in the eye. He

said "I am sorry about this, Silverwings, but there is no way around it. In order for so many to live on this island, we have to turn to the ocean for food."

>I didn't know what to say to this disturbing information and we took to the air again. So I cannot hunt what I want and not eat what I want? So the reality of living on this island is that I will have to eat fish while my favourite prey is near?
_I felt distressed.
_Food. What is more important than food? _

"Come, Silverwings, let's gain height to get an overview over the island." Nighthawk said. We climbed straight up and it didn't even take that long before we indeed overlooked all of the island. It wasn't all wooded, the highest part was covered in heather.

>But this is it? This is all of the island? Berk is supposed to be the biggest island around and even this island wasâ€¦ small, much too small for my taste. My heart sank; even all of Berk was nothing compared to the Mainland. It made me feel homesick.

_Oh, the majestic expanses of taiga! Nothing but taiga from one horizon to the other, no matter how high you climbed. Only when you reached the thin airs high up and saw the earth bend in a curve beneath you, did you see glittering ice to the northâ€¦ _

Unable to watch any longer I soared down and sped towards the far end of the island. Being faster than Nighthawk, burdened with Hiccup, I landed on a cliff's edge before he arrived. I felt so uprooted because of all recent changes in my life that for the first time I seriously doubted my decisions. Had I made the wrong choice? Wouldn't it be better to return to the Mainland with my children? But what about Fireweed? Can I separate her from Kari? And once gone, there is no hope of returning for several years. My children would rapidly outgrow the baskets and then there would be no return unless their own wings carry them.

Nighthawk landed next to me. "Silverwings?"

>"You tell me I cannot hunt what I want. Not eat what I want" I snapped at him. "This island is so small it's hardly bigger than my territory. And I cannot even call it mine! I have to share it with many dragons. So many that you do not even know them all, you told me. How strange is that! And there are so many humans, it is suffocating. The only spot that is mine is the little glade and the house. And that is not even mine, it's ours. What dragoness does not have her own territory? Everything is different here. I knew there would be changes, butâ€¦" What about my freedom, to do as I please?
_I turned away from him and flopped down, overlooking the ocean. My sensors told me I looked in the direction of the Mainland.
Home.

"You can always go backâ€¦" Nighthawk said in a quiet voice from behind me.

>I did not turn around to him. I was at a loss. My love for Nighthawk had felt as wonderful as flowers carpeting the forest floor in springtime. Was the reality of life on Berk changing it?<p>

_A love like flowers in springtimeâ€¦ but the flowers of spring do not last, they wither and fall. _

To realise that gave a pang of pain. Had I been wrong about everything?

Flowers wither and fall, but the plant lives. Flowers have to fade away in order for the plant to bear fruitâ€| Necessary changesâ€|

Necessary changesâ€| Nothing stays the same for ever, not even love, it seems. It changes. Changes youâ€|

I turned my head to look at Nighthawk again. There he stood, stiff and tense, looking out over the ocean. This time he did not plead or humble himself like he had done before. It was a decisive moment and it was up to me.

I stood up, walked over to Nighthawk and gently pressed my head against his.

>He deflated. "I had not realised how much you would have to give up, Silverwings" he softly said.
"Neither did I. But lifeâ€| changeâ€|" I stuttered. "Back in the taiga I would be without you, my love. And without many new friends. Butâ€| my daughterâ€| and my favourite food is taken away from me; I will regret that dearly." I sighed. "It will have to be give and take, I guess. And I received much already."

It had been a sobering experience and we started out flying back quietly. Hiccup, who had given us space while we were on the ground, now rode Nighthawk in silence with a pensive look on his face. Again I noticed their closeness, like they were one in flight. Nighthawk's sleek, strong body caught my eye. Suddenly could not suppress the urge to touch him, so I brushed his wingtip with mine. Surprised, he looked at me. "Sorry." I said "Sorry I upset you. â€"No, hush. I'm being difficult, I know I am. I mean, have I even said sorry to you once? It was long overdue." Now a grin crept on his face. He stroked my wingtip too and calmly we sailed back.

**Gunna the wise woman

>When we circled our glade, we saw Kjell standing on the lookout, waving at us and signalling excitedly. He carried an urgent message: "Gunna asked for you, Toothless. She also much wishes to see your lady and the children. She would have liked to give you more time, but she feels her end is coming. Will you please come? Hinnan told me that she is already so much weaker than yesterdayâ€|"

>Nighthawk shot me a worried glance and I nodded: of course we would go, I already started to gather the children.<p>

During our long travel Nighthawk had told me about Gunna, the wise woman of Hiccup's tribe. Also that she had grown old and that he feared he would not see her alive again. Her successor, Hinnan, looked after her, he told me. I knew Nighthawk greatly respected her and why. That's why in no time we were on our way in a quick trot. Nighthawk let Hiccup ride him for speed.

Yes, Nighthawk had grown terribly fond of Gunna. At first, he told me, she ignored him when all others of Hiccup's tribe gawked at him or stealthily tried to touch him. But she had not hesitated to come to his aid when Hiccup and he had split up in the first major row of their friendship. Her wise intervention had brought them back together, and she gave her people a better understanding of the strange, solitary Night Fury in their midst.

>When she had looked Nighthawk up, lurking at the other side of the

island all angry and confused, they had sat together in silence. At that moment Nighthawk realised how intrigued he was, how much he wanted her to talk to him and tell him stories. To let him share in the wisdom he saw in her eyes. But she had kept silent and only at their parting said the words that made him rush back to Hiccup*.<p>

"It did not take long before I started to stalk her, Silverwings. I felt so much drawn to her. I followed her around secretly, though what is secret about a black dragon trying to slink through the middle of the village in broad daylight, huh huh huh. I felt so stupid. She knew in no time, of course" Nighthawk told me with a twinkle in his eyes. "She kept me dangling for a while, just for fun, I guess. But unobtrusively she took up the habit of sitting on a log overlooking the docks, away from the crowd. Thus she forced me to give up my secrecy and approach her. Eventually I mustered the courage -or should I say: overcame my pride- and sat down silently at some distance behind her. But did she acknowledge me then, I ask you? No! I had to go sit next to her and huff a greeting before she addressed me. She sure knows how to exercise her authority. Could be a dragon!"

"Hello Nighthawk" she greeted back. I nodded and turned my head towards her when suddenly I sprang to my feet, backing away from her. She had used my true name, howâ€|?
>"I know things, my brave dragon. I simply do, don't get alarmed" she said with a little smile. "Things 'come to me'. I sense a lot, more than my people think I do. It's a gift I was born with as one cannot learn such a thing. What I needed to learn though was how to master it. And I had to learn all other knowledge and lore that come with the job the hard way as an apprentice, rehearsing and memorising until I fell over with sleep. But I honed my skills to perfection during my long life."
Then she cackled some. "Of course I don't know everything. Nobody does. I failed to see what Hiccup was up to at first."

After a silence she continued "I instruct my tribe, and advise Stoick who was as stubborn as they come, but who was wise enough to heed my council. Became a skilled chief, he did, could have been much worse. He definitely stepped up to the challenge.
>At festivals I tell and retell the lore of our tribe to my people. I much like the art of telling stories, dragon, but I wish I had a more willing ear than that of the average villager occupied by the content of his mug."<p>

"At that I must have beamed, Silverwings, ears wide, wings trembling with excitement like: Pick me! Pick me! I'm all ears! Huh huh, that smart woman. Of course she knew what I had come for. She cleverly lay out the bait and I took it instantly. Oh, was I hooked. She outsmarted me by far!
>She chuckled and said "I behave terribly, dragon, because I know full well you want to hear stories. Please forgive this old woman for teasing you so. But it amused me tremendously." And she cackled some more.
From that moment on she called me 'dragon'. She never said my true name again, but also never addressed me by the name of 'Toothless'."

"And so she started to tell me stories. First simple or funny ones. But she was also fickle and moody and sometimes would only drone up the names of all flowers on Berk or all different types of rock. But

I kept with her and eventually she relaxed and enjoyed our little meetings. She would test me at times and for instance mention the names of all families on Berk except for one and ask me if she missed one. My answer was nearly always right.

>Eventually she rewarded my patience and told me much of what she knew. Of the families of Berk and their histories. Of the history of the tribe. About how long ago they had come to Berk and why. Where they had come from. About the beliefs of the tribe and all things they hold sacred."<p>

"She told me their names for the stars, Silverwings. She knows a lot about the path of sun and moon, nearly as much as we dragons do, and she had an intricate way to help her remember when it was time to plant the crops and when was the right time for the festivals. She told me about the Romans and where they originate from. She made a drawing of the world in the sand and told me which tribes live where and what the lands are like. Also about the taiga, Silverwings, and it proved she was right about many things! She also knew some of the things Thundercloud told you. About an ocean at the other side of the world. About a people that live in the lands bordering it, that revere a whiskered, elegant dragon that sometimes visits their cities. She told me so many things of interest and importance. I listened mesmerised, and forgot nothing she told me. Not even the names of the flowers on Berk."

"Strange thing, I share so much with you, dragon" she mused "but the paths of both of our kinds have intertwined. We will walk together, or should I say, fly together for a while, but I have a foreboding your kind will outlast us. So I trust you with all of our lore, our legacy, to keep alive the Miracle of Berk. And to maybe even pass it on to one of your children." At that my head sank down, Silverwings. Being a cripple, I did not believe that ever a child would spring from my fire. And now see me, see us."

I nuzzled my love who told me such a wonderful and strange story.

"You know, Gunna also told me that maybe our kind came from the sea and once again will sleep there for a long period of time. She pondered an ancient rhyme which children sing at play:

_Fire rose from water

>On the first of days
First the fire warms us
>Then the fire burns us
Then it grows so friendly
>And for a while it stays
Then it crawls back under
>And sleeps beneath the waves
Rise again! Rise again!
>In a thousand years

It is believed to be a rhyme about the sun, but living together with us dragons made her think again. We do bury our dead in the waves, butâ€¦ I don't know.

>'The sun only stays away for one night and not for a thousand years she said. Of course there is no way of knowing if she is right. But why should a human sense something about the dragon kind that we ourselves do not know? It's just too strange."<p>

"Oh, and about children: often children would gather around her and beg her for stories. Then I would sit down with them. I observed how she skilfully downsized a story to fit their young brains without losing too much of the meaning.

>I realised her trust in me when I heard her telling lore to the villagers on festivals in the great hall. She told them story after story. Every story was right and detailed in a certain way, but I knew the depth behind it and what she did not tell: the story behind the story. Or should I say: the truth behind the lore. I have a hunch this must be the difference between knowledge and wisdom, but I cannot put a claw on it. Although truth, truthâ€¦" he paused and looked down, to continue "truth is fickle, like smoke. You see it, but when you bite it, there is nothing to get a grip on."<p>

Nighthawk looked at me again and chuckled: "It must have been a strange thing to the villagers: seeing us walk or sit together. They had already grown accustomed to me dropping a fish at her doorstep regularly, but ever more often they saw a Night Fury patiently waiting next to her door to see if their wise woman would maybe come out and take a stroll with him.
>Hiccup never fully understood, but at times when he looked for me he knew where to look first. Sometimes I would not hear Hiccup call me when I listened to Gunna, which really annoyed him!"<p>

So now we were on our way to Gunna. Soon we reached the village. The villagers looked up in amazement as we hurried past them in a single file: first Nighthawk, carrying Hiccup, with Kjell jogging next to him, next the yearlings and me at the rear.

When we arrived, we barely fitted inside Gunna's house. She lay down on a flat nest of sorts that was raised from the ground on poles. A woman that must be Hinnan helped her up.

>I could not help but gawk. Never had I seen a human that ancient. The flesh of her face and body had sunken, her head-pelt had become very thin. With feeble movements she shifted somewhat. But her eyes, they were something else entirely! When she looked at Nighthawk, they shone brightly, and the wrinkles in her face rearranged in a joyful manner.<p>

A hoarse voice: "There you are, dragon! You kept me waiting, didn't you? But why do I complain? Waiting is all that is left to meâ€¦ Still, you never failed me, my good dragon. Hello, Hiccup, good to see you. You came back in time."

She coughed.

"Don't be sad, dragon. Heaven willing, we will meet again."

>At that she coughed again and closed her eyes. Worried, Nighthawk nuzzled her hand, but when he snuffled her face she opened her eyes again and asked in a surprisingly clear voice "Did you bring your lady? Is Silverwings with you?"<p>

I neared her respectfully and nudged her hand. When I dared to raise my eyes I was surprised to see tears in her eyes. "Silverwings" she rasped "have you any idea how happy you made my dragon?"

>Her eyes closed again, but a sweet, contented smile played around her lips. She whispered "I heard you came to stay. That is good, my dear, goodâ€¦"<p>

Silence.

"You have my blessing, you and Nighthawk, and your children. I wishedâ€¦ I will watch over you from the Hereafter, if such a thing

is possibleâ€|

>Then she looked me full in the eye, and instantly I felt enveloped in the warm glow that poured out of her eyes. It made my head sink until it touched her side, if only just. She placed a frail hand on my head and left it there for a moment, a light weight.<p>

"Now show me your children" she asked, visibly mustering strength.

>We lined them up. They looked up at her nervously.
"Hello little darlings. Don't be afraid. My body is very old, I will soon die. But when I die, I believe I will get wings, just like you. Then I'll flyâ€| soar like you dragonsâ€| like I often did in my dreamsâ€| Then I'll flyâ€| home."

She paused, looking at my children.

"Your father will tell you all about me. I told him a lot of stories. Which one of you likes stories?"

>All nodded yes, but Pinecone rose on her hind legs and nodded vigorously.
"So you are the oneâ€|" Gunna whispered and smiled a little smile. "I will ask your father to tell you everything I told him. -Nighthawk, you tell her everything, will you, my dragon? You know what I mean. You have my consent."

With a weakened voice she continued "Now leave me, little Furies. You made an old woman happy. Go, Silverwings, all is well. Now that I have seen you, I can die in peace."

>She sank back onto the nest. Her eyes fell to, her pale face had flushed. The talk had exhausted her.<p>

"Did she just die, mammy? Boulder asked confused.

>"Oh, can I watch her fly away?" Tumble asked hopefully.
"No, my darlings" I replied "she went to rest, and we should let her. And we will not get to see her last flight: I sense that is not for us to witness. Come with me." And I guided them out. When I watched over my shoulder I saw Hiccup tenderly hold her hand, and Nighthawk huff a breath over her. _Yes, she saved their friendship. They love her for that._

Suddenly my children pressed themselves against my body. My wings covered them immediately and I looked around to faceâ€| a crowd! It turned out many villagers had followed us and now gaped at me and at my wings, where the yearlings were hidden. While the eyes of some humans shone, there were also many with a guarded look. They must have heard what I did to Snotlout this morning. But most looked worried at the house as they realised why we had been summoned.

Though I felt no immediate threat coming from the whispering crowd, I shrank back to the walls of the house nonetheless. We were surrounded completely, there was no way out. My heart started to pound. Not wanting to get aggressive again, I didn't know what to do.

>Suddenly I heard a familiar voice. "Lady Silverwings! Lady! Shall I bring you home? Would you like to come with me?" It was Valla. She stepped out of the crowd and hesitantly neared me. Yes, she must be nervous as only a few hours ago she had witnessed my attack on Snotlout. Looking at the child's friendly face, my ears perked up again and I gave a snort. She then asked the humans to make way, and the crowd split wide apart to lend us passage. Relieved, I followed

Valla while keeping my children under my wings. Still many humans pointed and a sigh went through the crowd when they caught a glimpse of them.<p>

Valla first guided me past the houses silently, but once we cleared the village she began to babble. "My Dad told us not to be afraid of you. Dragons are our friends. You will be too. That is, I hope you will be." I listened to her pleasant voice, while she stole glances at the emerging yearlings. "Did you hear that there will be a great welcome for you?" she asked me. "It will be held in the Arena. That's where we have our outdoor festivals."
>The Arena. Now what did that remind me of? Something nagged at the back of my head, but I dismissed it as I watched my children getting ever more playful with Valla.

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*** see my other story "Toothless in a crisis".**

**Inspiration

>As a writer you need inspiration and challenge. I am pleased to say I had both, so this chapter has been inspired by:

- a suggestion from my editor Tagesh. He asked me how everyday life on Berk would affect Silverwings. He is right in asking so. In every relationship there is the issue of actually living together, and what it might do to you and to the love you feel. So that's what the part "Food and freedom" is about.

- a notion in Cressida Cowell's book of 'How To Train Your Dragon'. The first book of the series starts and ends with Hiccup describing how dragons are disappearing from the face of the earth as they crawl back into the ocean where they once came from, leaving no trace. And that maybe, just maybe, they sleep deep down on the ocean's floor to one day awaken again. Tagesh and I discussed this easily overlooked notion and we were both much drawn to the idea.
>As an aside, I suddenly come up with a parallel: what if 'dragons' lie dormant, buried in the deepest regions of our brain. To emerge again when 'Heroes are needed once more'. What a thought.
That aside: IMAGINE, IF ONE DAY THEY WOULD BE AROUND AGAIN, JUST IMAGINE.

>The final section of the chapter ('Gunna') touches on this.<p>

A short note from Tagesh: Before discussing these concepts with White Aspen, I had paid attention to the movie but not the books. When Aspen told me about how the book opens and Hiccup tells us "There were dragons when I was a boyâ€|" and in closing mentions "There may yet come a time when the dragons will come back" I was amazed- and knew I wanted to read it for myself. The idea of "the once and future" dragons strikes a chord with me and opens my mind to imagining what else the HTTYD universe will contain. Perhaps Hiccup would be pleased at Aspen adding a few more words on the subject of dragon behaviour and lore. And I look forward to exploring what these ideas might reveal.

- a suggestion from Gamejoy

He was curious if maybe there would be Nadder yearlings, and how they and the Fury yearlings would mix. Well Gamejoy, they turned out to be Gronckle hatchlings, but I hope you enjoyed them anyway.

****About the content of this chapter****

****Gunna****, the third part, was originally all I wanted to write here. The story about Gunna has been growing ever since I wrote "Toothless in a crisis", November 2011. I am so happy this little story reaches you in this way.

I had tremendous fun imagining Toothless 'secretly' following Gunna around everywhere. But I also cherish the idea of Gunna telling him stories (imagine them sitting together, enjoying each other's company) and eventually planting the lore and history of the tribe in his brain. He in turn will pass it on to his daughter Pinecone. And maybe, just maybe, Pinecone now sleeps beneath the waves to one day rise again and tell us about 'The Miracle of Berk'.
sigh

****Breakfast****, the first part, just happened to come out, and turned out to provide a little fun in between a tense night and Silverwings' disillusion.

Thanks for reading!

12. The Arena

****Summary:**

>Silverwings has been able to accept the fact that her lover Nighthawk has a close bond with a human. Through ups and downs she eventually is able to fully accept Hiccup. Nighthawk is overjoyed to meet his children. Hiccup extends a formal invitation to her to come visit Berk. She agrees to this and travelling is made possible by a group of dragons and humans that carry her children in a basket. Being very moved by Nighthawk's love and all that has passed, Silverwings finally speaks her wish that they mate for life.

****Eventually they reach Berk, being welcomed by a swarm of dragons. After a brief meeting with Hiccup's family they go to their house, that is not in the village, but some distance into the woods, much to Silverwing's delight. Early next morning it happens that both Fireweed and Kari, Hiccup's youngest daughter, leave their safe homes to go look for the other. It becomes clear why: they are drawn to each other so much, it must be bonding.**
>After a few hours of sleep Silverwings is woken up by a bunch of dragons who crashed in for breakfast, not completely to her delight. Next she takes the opportunity to scan the island for the first time, together with Toothless and Hiccup. That proves a major disappointment, the island is too small for her taste and worse: Toothless explains that her main staple food, deer, are off limits. Upset by all this, and by the previous night, she almost decides to return to the Mainland.

****Once home again they are summoned by the wise woman of the tribe, Gunna as she feels her end is near. They speak with her on her death bed, and she gives them her blessing. Little Pinecone seems to get a special assignment. Valla, while escorting Silverwings out of the village speaks of the Arena: **"Did you hear that there will be a great welcome for you? It will be held in the Arena. That's the place where we have all of our outdoor festivals."**

>The Arena. Now what did that remind me of? Something nagged at the back of my head, but I dismissed it, as I watched my children getting ever more playful with Valla.

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****Chapter 12. The Arena ****

****The ring of doom**

>We stood halfway down the ramp leading into the pit of the Arena: Nighthawk, Hiccup, Kjell, and I. I figured out soon enough that this was the death ring where Toothless once had been humiliated and imprisoned. The place where for centuries the humans had honed their skills in killing us dragons off. We had walked down to this place after we left the children in the care of Meatlug. Once we were done here we'd return to them and Hiccup would bring his children to play with ours, something Fireweed eagerly anticipated.

Hiccup thought it was a good idea to introduce me to the place where the festivities would be held the next day.

>"The Arena has been training grounds for a long time now, Silverwings" Hiccup told me. "For a while it was called 'the Dragon Academy' but nowadays it is simply referred to as 'the Arena'. But by now you will have realised that this originally was the place to learn how to kill dragons. I am sorry about that, Silverwings."<p>

I nodded. Introducing me to this place had seemed like a good idea, but to actually be here threw me off balance far more than I expected. Somewhat shaky I followed the others down to the centre of the pit.

>"Much has changed here" Nighthawk said. "The gate has gone and so has the iron web closing the pit from above." He spoke too fast, obviously nervous about how the whole thing would go down with me. I looked up, imagining seeing the sky but having no means of escape. It made me shudder. The eerie feeling I had grew. I looked around at the forbidding walls. Appalled I noticed that the pit had been hewn out of living rock. I could blast rock, but only with great effort, so I astounded at the amount of work it must have taken to create this place. Sickening, that so much ingenuity went into perfecting its shape, its prisons inside. This perfection, with the sole purpose of killing dragons, made it all the more gruesome.<p>

This death ring was dominance, carved into stone. The very proof of the capacity and willpower of humans to slaughter us. I realised once more that humans _will _be the end of us. Not the humans from Berk, but other humans in the end will dominate us and do to us whatever they like. Another shudder went through me. _Oh, my childrenâ€¦|_

I looked up at the rim above. A few people that had followed us, stood there, looking down on us. Imagining how humans once looked down on the 'spectacle' that took place, I croaked "So they cheered from up there, when dragons were tortured and killed? No dragon came out alive, you told me. And you lay here too, all chained up." Unease and aggression built and I demanded "Where did you lie?"

>"Here, at this spot, but â€¦".
BAM - a ball of fire blasted the spot.

>Nighthawk looked baffled at my smoking maw as I urged once more "And which one was your prison? Tell me!"
"That one. But Silverwings, don't-"

>I burst out, firing shot after shot into that ghastly prison,

wanting to bombard that place into oblivion. But however many shots I fired, nothing more happened than that the ceiling cracked with a loud bang and something inside burst into flame.<p>

Those walls are too strong, even for my fire. I failed to make this prison budge, even having used nearly all of my fire power. My head reeled, I had shot way too fast. Dimly I noticed all humans on the rim had disappeared. Feeling ever more queasy I tried to focus on the walls again, but they danced before my eyes. Now that my aggression faded, fear surfaced. Fear and disgust. With a mounting feeling of nausea I spun around, the grim walls zooming past my eyes.

No escape. Only deathâ€| deathâ€| deathâ€|

Panic struck. My legs buckled under me. Fading voices pierced the ringing noise in my ears: "Silverwings!"
>"We have to get her out of hereâ€|"<p>

_*Darkness. Suddenly lightning cracked, briefly lighting up the cave. Thunder boomed, the sound rolling on for a long time. Near to panic we huddled together, my brothers and I. Curling in on ourselves we keened our misery, silenced in fright at every new flash of lightning. Where was mammy? Always when there was a thunderstorm, we had crept against mammy's big, warm body. And then she put a wing over us and told us stories. But she had not returned from the hunt. It took her so long. She had never been away this long. Mammy? Where are you, mammy? I started sobbing. Mammy? Mammy?
>Then a warm tongue washed my face. Instantly I felt such relief. Now we were safe. Safe at last. Mammy...*

I cracked my eyes open. It wasn't that dark. In fact it wasn't dark at all. I opened my eyes some more. The licking stopped. I felt disoriented.

>"You passed out, darling." -Nighthawk's voice.
Now I realised it had been he who licked me. I looked up at his face.

>"You blew up the place with force, and then you staggered and fell down. This place seems to have triggered your worst nightmare. I fear it was about the day your mother disappeared, because of what you moaned in the delirium."
"Mammy" I whispered with a sob. My body shook uncontrollably.

Nighthawk crept close against me and placed his head on top of mine. I sobbed some more but his heavy body, half covering mine, became a loving presence to focus on. As was the steady beating of his heart and his even breathing in-and-out, in-and-out, steadying me, clearing my head.

>I whispered "I wish I could have been by your side like this, when you were so utterly forsaken."
He softly said "It's over, darling. It's long over." After another couple of breaths he added "Let me tell you this: when you walk into this ring tomorrow, together with me, it will feel as if you bless the place with all the happiness you gave me. It will chase away any remaining shadows."
>It made me sigh. "Then I will. I understand now." I said.<p>

I looked at the doors that I blasted. Half molten they hung down, charred. The stone ceiling had cracked. Smoke curled up from within.

>"What have I doneâ€| first thing I do on this island is to wreck things. What will the humans think of me. If only they do not hold it against you."

>"Well" he said, and a bit of amusement crept into his voice, "they sure will feel what you did. Inside my former prison is the storage of the sitting-benches. As you reduced them to ashes, the humans will have to stand on their feet the whole time tomorrow. The benches will be sorely missed."<p>

****Paying my respects**

>"Come, Silverwings, I want to show you something" Hiccup said. Kjell had brought a bucket of water, and I just finished to lap it up. After that, we left the arena and walked the fringes of the village. Walking, the simple physical act of walking, calmed me down further. I did an unusual amount of walking these days, not wanting to fly where Nighthawk could only use his feet. Soon we reached the ramps leading down to the Docks. We went halfway down and stopped there, looking out over a stretch of ocean up to the tiny islands some distance away.

"I stood here, Silverwings, when my father sailed away with Toothless as his captive" Hiccup said quietly. "I felt like dying." After a moment he continued "I also stood here when the ship with my mother's body had floated away far enough for my father to set it aflame with a burning arrow."

I sensed the silent grief that he did not show openly. Looking at the dull surface of the water, I understood it hid more dead than just Hiccup's mother. I also understood Hiccup's point: so many deaths on the account of us dragons, leaving behind disrupted families and little infants like Hiccup.

>So there lie the bones of your mother, Hiccup. There, beneath the waves. And you were so young, then. Too young.

>Just moments before I had a recollection of losing my mother at a tender age. So in all the confusion and hurt of this day I felt for Hiccup and bumped my head against his chest. To lose your mother like that, not by accident, but by a hateful act of my kindâ€¦ I am sorry, Hiccup, so very sorry.

As if Hiccup felt what I tried to get across, he leaned in to the touch.

>"What is it with you, Silverwings" he muttered "you were not in this war, how come you are affected this deeply? It's as if you are living it now-" and he stroked my ears with his hands. That was a nice feeling. Never had I been this intimate with a human, not even with Hiccup, but it did not feel wrong. Hiccup then carefully broke the contact "-but thank you, Lady, for your sympathy."<p>

Suddenly realisation hit me that she had been Stoick's mate! _Then I must tell him too! Tell him how sorry I am about the loss of his mate. _

>Acting on impulse, I took wing. I knew where to find Stoick, as together with several of his people he had gone through some huge doors near the top of a hill. So I flew there and landed on the stairs that lead to the closed doors.
"Stoick! Stoick!" I barked, calling him to me. When it seemed he didn't hear me I advanced a bit and called again, but the doors stayed shut. After waiting some more, I decided to call him as loud as I could as are after all they a _loud_ people. So I roared "STOICK! COME TO ME. I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO YOU!"

Now something happened: the doors flew open and Stoick jumped out along with several of his people. I hesitated, aware of their stance,

of the look in their eyes. _Whâ€|? What?â€| Why do you look at me like that?

>For a moment I was too astonished, but then I saw metal things in their hands. W_eapons.

>I flicked my wings to make them stop, but that evoked no reaction. So, growling, I ducked, assuming a fighting stance myself. Instantly my fire built. _No human treats me like this.

>Their faces hardened, and then I truly saw the faces ofâ€| enemies.

>Turn away, flee! You don't know this, I told myself_. Yet aggression and a strange fascination kept me rooted to the spot while my fire nearly boiled over.

At that moment shouts from below reached my ears: the voices of Nighthawk and Hiccup! They had come running after me. "STOP, SILVERWINGS!" "FATHER, STOP. PLEASE."

>Nighthawk reached me, and Hiccup jumped off his back. "Father, stop! She cameâ€| she just wants toâ€|" he panted.
Nighthawk sprang in front of me, wings opened wide. I spat the fire, that had been too ready, to the side.

>"Father" I heard Hiccup shout "together with Silverwings we looked out over the harbour. We wanted to show her where our war victims had gone. She seemed much affected by it. Then sheâ€| she suddenly took off. To see you, father. I think that she came to you, to express her sympathy."
"Sympathy? Are you sure, son?" Stoick asked. "We heard her roar loudly. I was told she blasted the Arena. We think she has come for revenge."

_Revenge? No. _Confused, I sank on my haunches. "What have I done, Nighthawk?" I stammered, looking up at his face. "I just wanted toâ€| but I got aggressive soâ€| so quickly."

>"Oh, Silverwings, you've been-"
"stupidâ€| Iâ€| The look in their eyes, Nighthawkâ€| the aggressionâ€| their facesâ€| were enemy faces. And then I got aggressive too." I was beside myself.

>"Everyone in the village must have heard you roar in the Arena, and blast my prison. They must have thought you sought revenge. You really need to try to not react on impulse anymore, as long as you don't understand the humans, or the sensitivities here."<p>

"I've been so stupid. Oh, Nighthawk, please forgive me. I don't know how to behave among humans, and now they will be mad at me and throw me out. They will be mad at you too, for bringing an aggressive female to Berk. What if they throw you out too?"

But before Nighthawk could say anything to that, Hiccup came to stand before me. "Silverwings" he said softly. The way he said it broke the spell. Hiccup at least was not mad at me. _Thank you Hiccup._ I stood up and nudged the side of his head.

>"Come, Silverwings, go over to my father and tell him what you came to tell him." Still ashamed, with my head hanging low, I walked up the stairs. Nighthawk walked beside me. There were the feet of Stoick. I shot his face a quick glance, then hung my head again and stepped away from Nighthawk. I did wrong, not he.

"Silverwings" Stoick said with a stern voice "my son tells me that you didn't come here for revenge. Do you seek revenge?"

>I shook my head.
"You came here to tell me something."

>I nodded. Then Hiccup told all that had happened.
"Is it like my son says, Lady?" Stoick asked. Again I nodded, still not daring to

raise my eyes. A murmur went through the crowd. Then all went silent, eager to hear his reaction.

"Thank you" Stoick said.

Thank youâ€¦ he said thank you._ I was still taking that in when I heard Stoick move. Suddenly my head was taken in a firm grip, and lifted up. I gasped, as his hands held me tight. But surprisingly, along with my head, my heart lifted up. Astonished and gladdened I looked Stoick in the eye. The enemy-look had gone. Instead, pain was visible in the set of his mouth. _An old wound, torn open by me. _Instantly my heart went out to this scarred, elderly man. _Scarred, we're all scarred._ I closed my eyes and pressed the top of my head firmly against his chest. Hard as rock it was, but beneath I felt the rapid beat of his heart. His hands went around my jaws once more, clumsier now. Then he let go and stepped back.
>I opened my eyes and looked up at him.<p>

"Welcome, Silverwings. You are welcome among us."

****The Arena** â€" a place of pride and joy
>So, today we gathered again to the Arena, standing just outside at the top of the ramp leading down. The contrast to the gloom and painful recollections of yesterday couldn't be greater. Today there was an atmosphere of merry anticipation, while the rim above the pit filled with a noisily chattering crowd, a mixture of humans and dragons, finding themselves a suitable spot.

Even the weather contributed to the festive mood. Interrupted at times by big fluffy clouds sailing rapidly past a clear blue sky, sunlight splashed down, brightening up everything and especially the fluttering pieces of cloth attached to many long poles. The images depicted on the colourful cloth had me intrigued. They were like dragons, but strangely altered; sometimes depicted together with humans, which also don't look like real humans. The same strange thing goes on with their houses which have protrusions that look like dragon heads. But I shook myself free of these thoughts. Soon I would have ample time to ask about these things and contemplate the doings of the humans.

The children were very excited and were shooting back-and-forth from under my wing to under their father's, while casting quick glances at the activity close by. But at any loud noise, or any large dragon looming near, they pressed themselves firmly against my side. This morning we prepared them for the things about to happen: that we would be welcomed in the Arena, that everyone would get to see us and be very LOUD, and that afterwards there would be a party.

Hiccup, Astrid and their children had accompanied us to the Arena, little Kari happily hopping along next to Fireweed. And Stormfly walked with us too of course, busily chattering and trotting along quite proudly. In the village, Aina, together with her Nadder Sunrise, joined us and so did ever more humans and dragons of the travelling group, so eventually we arrived at the Arena with a rather large group of followers in tow.

I felt good, excited even. Silently I watched Nighthawk who had a chat with some of the "Hero-Five". I relished in seeing his stance, the way he carried his head and wings. This male, that had been at such a disadvantage when we met last year, and who had remained

somewhat of an outsider all those years on Berk, now brimmed with confidence and happiness. _Yes, my love, this is your finest hour._

It was indeed. Nighthawk positively beamed when Stoick invited us to enter the Arena and we both walked down the ramp, the children hidden beneath our wings. An excited murmur went through the crowd when we entered the Arena. I remembered Nighthawk's words. "When you walk with me into this ring tomorrow, it will chase away any remaining shadows." _You were right_, I thought happily, when I saw how he carried himself.

****Stoick's speech**

>Standing in the middle of the pit, we looked up at the gathering of dragons and humans. There was Stoick, standing on an elevated platform together with Hinnan, the soon-to-be wise woman of the tribe. Stoick spread out his arms in a commanding gesture and addressed the crowd.

"Welcome, everyone! Well, I get to show my face in public once again."

Some chuckles and comments.

"Now, if somebody told me we'd hold a welcome party for a dragon, well, I would have tied him to a mast and shipped him off for fear they were going mad! And you know it! Hahahah."

Cheers and comments erupted all around.

"But here we are. My son and the search party have safely returned. And no one is more surprised than me that they managed to haul in a Night Fury dragoness plus five wee dragonets. Today, we celebrate Toothless returned with his mate!

>Today, we celebrate Toothless has become a father!"<p>

Vast cheer.

"Yesterday we experienced a revival of the ol' days, as a certain dragoness thoroughly wrecked the place, heh heh heh. So we did a hasty repair, but mind the crack over there. She sure makes her presence known, especially to our feet, as she torched the sitting benches.

>Let's say I hope you can handle your lady, Toothless. She and the wee ones will keep you busy. Your quiet bachelor days are over, I fear!"<p>

Raucous laughter echoed around the rocks.

"That wild beauty made me realise how far we have come with the dragons. And it isn't a bad thing to realise once more it started with my son and Toothless. Let's give them a hand of applause!"

Once more the humans made their hands come together in that specific sharp noise that is called 'clapping'.

"A special note to the young and daring! That is: all youngsters here, heh heh heh. If you don't want to get fried, be careful with this dragoness. Do not startle her, do not approach her or especially her dragonets for that matter. She has been a loner dragoness, used

to dealing with any situation swiftly and mostly deadly I presume. So take care.

One last thing. I say that our Hero Dragon must have had luck written in the stars, because once more he did the impossible: as a cripple win over a dragoness, and a feisty one at that, the lucky bastard! He even convinced her to join him on this windy island!

>So here we welcome Toothless' mate, the beauty of the taiga and the proud mother of five: LADY SILVERWINGS!"<p>

Thunderous cheer.

It made me feel welcome so much that my wings spread wide as a "thank you". The children now also cheered and chirped. I took a look at them and said: "Isn't this nice?" They beamed and chattered back to me, but didn't leave the safety of the wings as yet.

The noise died down when Stoick once more raised his hand. "My people, as you have heard, we're combining the occasion of welcoming Silverwings with Finnar's performance of his long expected Song. So, let's hear Finnar" he said, transferring the attention to the bard with a broad gesture.

****Finnar and the yearlings**

>Finnar stepped forward. He put his harp in front of him and addressed the crowd.

>"People of Berk. Dear friends." he began. "Many of you know why I came to your island from my faraway home, you know, the lowlands bordering the mouth of the river Rhine. I just had to witness the miracle of humans living in harmony with dragons. They are not around where I live. Many of my people cannot believe it is true and dismiss it as another sailor's tale. But I wanted to see for myself, with the aim to put it into Song. That's why you took this Hollander in, and today I will repay your hospitality. To be able to piece this Song together, I talked with many of you. The last bit of inspiration I needed came on the mission to find Toothless' dragoness. Back in the Taiga I already did a rehearsal, but after a final polish, I will sing it for you today."<p>

The crowd murmured in anticipation. Several people encouraged him the Viking-way: "Stop talking, start singing!" "It's about time, you did!" "We fed you long enough."

Unfazed, Finnar continued "But first I will play you something special. I'll make it short so please bear with me. It's a little piece of dragon song, from no other than one of Toothless' dragonets! His children stole my heart, especially one. She actually sings to me! I have tried to catch her song in play as it is strange and wonderful, like dragons are strange and wonderful to me. Here is 'Pinecone's Song'.

He stroked the harp and looked our way. "Won't you come out, little ones? I am going to play the harp. Will you come to me, so the people can see you?" Five little heads appeared from under our wings, but shot back as a loud "oohhh" went through the crowd. Finnar smiled a little knowing smile and started to play. He was right of course, as my yearlings emerged shyly. They hesitantly pattered to him, eying the crowd, but eying the harp more. I looked up at the humans and, saw their rapture. A delighted murmur went through the crowd. Then I looked at Nighthawk and saw how proud he was.

Then the music caught my attention too. Soon I wondered at this music as it was much like the singing of Pinecone, yet strangely altered. _This is what humans do_, I thought. _They alter things. Everything they touch somehow changes. It never stays the same_. Nevertheless, the music of the harp was sweet and innocent. It seemed to slowly fill up the death pit we stood in, as if with clear water. My eyes focussed on the walls again, those unyielding walls that had witnessed endless suffering and slaughter, but unlike yesterday it had become bearable to look at them.

>I silently praised Hiccup's wisdom. What if he hadn't introduced me to this place yesterday? I watched him and shot him a grateful look the moment he looked back. As if he understood, a little smile crept on his face. The soft, melodious music continued and somehow it seemed to wash off some of the invisible filth of death. That is what humans do too, I pondered. _They seem to sometimes find a solution, acquire resolve, in the strangest ways_. That's something that doesn't come to us dragons naturally.

When the music ended, Finnar did a strange thing: he put a finger over his lips while looking up at the crowd. The humans took some clue from it, as they did not cheer loudly, nor clap their hands. Instead they laughed, a very nice sound that fell down like rain.

>"Will you not greet the people of Berk?" I heard Nighthawk encourage the children. And sure enough they flapped their wings, having lost their nervousness. But Hiccup had a better idea. He signalled Kjell, who held out his hands to Pinecone. She readily hopped in and Kjell lifted her up and held her high. Hiccup shouted: "Here we have Pinecone, our fine little singer". Now the crowd couldn't hold back anymore and burst out in cheer. Pinecone however felt visibly safe in Kjell's big hands and flapped her wings again. Our other children were introduced the same way: "Boulder!" "Heather!" "Tumble!" "Fireweed!". After that the little ones returned to us.<p>

****Of Vikings and Dragons. The Song of Berk**

>Again Finnar addressed the crowd in a carrying voice. "My friends. The time has come for the Song. It was agreed that for this special occasion the Hero Dragons would be gathered once more. Even Meatlug, for this once. We all know how much she struggled with the past. But she is not the only one, that much I learned during my stay." Turning to the ramp he continued "I would like to invite the other Heroes to join us."

And down filed the dragons, Hookfang, the magnificent Firehide, accompanied by Snotlout; Stormfly, the Deadly Nadder; BelchBarf the Zippleback with the twins Ruffnut and Tuffnut, and finally, looking despondent, Meatlug the Gronckle with Fishlegs patting her side reassuringly. They joined Nighthawk, Hiccup and Astrid and settled on a spot opposite of Finnar.

>Kjell in the meantime took me and the children over to one side, while Stoick junior, Valla, Sunnar, Kurt and Kari went over to the other.<p>

"Behold the Heroes of Berk, the ones that set you free, man and dragon alike" Finnar shouted, and threw his fist in the air. The crowd raised its voice in one raw shout.

A silence fell but the air was charged. Tension rose as the humans realised that some parts of the Song would carry grave content.

People murmured, shuffling their feet.

Finnar struck a chord and shouted:

'Of Vikings and Dragons -The Song of Berk'

_In those days, long ago

>we set foot on this island
And looked up to the heavens

>Fearing they'd fall upon us
the daring Daughters of Wind
>the searing Sons of Fire.

_For ages we ferociously fought

>Steeling ourselves, wielding
weapons against tooth and claw.

>Doing raw battle, unyielding
To never-ceasing assaults._

_Year in and year out

>A long, twilight struggle
Against the enemies of man.

>Light the beacons! The foe
has come upon us once again!

>â€| â€| â€|

On and on he went, vividly describing a dragon attack on the village._ Unlike the first time I heard this Song, I now was able to listen to the tale unfolding. And even though I had already heard much about the War, the Song struck me with the raw images it evoked. Amid the turmoil of the attack, the Song concentrated on Hiccup, on the timid youngling he had been. In only a few lines Finnar nailed his loneliness, his insignificance.

Hiccup stood listening motionless, his shoulders sagging. The pain in his face was mirrored by Nighthawk, though the two did not look at each other.

>Then was Sung how Hiccup had spared the black beast's life, and how he had befriended the incapacitated dragon. Obviously, it was told in more detail than ever before, as many a gasp or exclamation escaped the listening crowd. Especially the part where they both fell from the sky had never been heard before, as the people shouted out in disbelief and horror. Learning to get the artificial fin right and ride the dragon hadn't been as easy as was always assumed.<p>

The part of them falling from the sky also did not escape the little ears of my children. "Mammy! Father fell! He fell from the sky!" they cried upset. I tried to calm them down but then it was thought better to lead them away so they could play. The music didn't enchant them as completely as it once did, so they understood too much now. In the light of this, we had taken precautions, so just outside the ring Aina stood ready, together with Sunrise. Kjell and I brought the little ones to them. As soon as they were engrossed in playing with a little ball of tightly wound leather rope, I returned to my place in the Arena. Luckily I had missed the parts where Nighthawk had been captured and humiliated, and where he had been misused on the ship.

>When Finnar Sang of the Battle with the Red Death, the people froze, their faces turning pale and grim. Again many names were Sung; this time of the humans that had perished on those bleak shores during that Battle.<p>

As the Song unfolded I watched my mate. It was clear that he, like

Hiccup, relived the events, invoked by the compelling Song of Finnar and the mesmerising sounds of his harp that thundered and thrilled, whispered and wept.

>I saw his horror when he disappeared beneath the waves; him quieting down when surrendering to death; the shock when Stoick had appeared to free him!
I saw the grim resolve when he took Hiccup into the thick of the clouds. I saw him cringe and shudder when once more they fell from the sky, this time without a timely salvation.

Like Hiccup and Nighthawk, the crowd also reacted vividly to the story. They sighed, shouted and murmured. Faces lit up, fell, paled and flushed in turn with the content of the Song. People froze, eyes glittering in faces as hard as stone. Hands covered mouths in shock; hung limply down; were balled into fists. Voices drifted into silence like the ashes that rained down.

Then Finnar's voice, barely above a whisper, Sang of Toothless, bruised and bleeding, holding Hiccup encased in his wings. Those listening seemed to be holding their breath until Finnar's voice rose: Hiccup was alive! All exhaled, and cheered as one. Even I felt the joy of that moment and I saw how it affected Hiccup by the reddening of his face.

The dragons also snorted, shuffled and flicked their wings, as they went along with the story, the Song bridging the gap between them and the humans. When Finnar Sang about their enslavement and rescue, they started Singing themselves. Finnar silenced but continued to play the harp, while the dragons named their Fallen and lamented their passage.

>Once the dragon's lament ended, the music picked up a merrier tune and Finnar Sang of Toothless working with other dragons between watching over a sleeping Hiccup. Stormfly, Hookfang and the others soon joined him, moving around in the village and pairing new dragons with hopeful Vikings.
I could feel the way everyone was moved, remembering those first days of adjusting to living together.

Finnar finished his Song recounting the day when Hiccup once more flew with Toothless. It seemed the Vikings' hearts soared along by the thunderous noise they made. It didn't upset me, knowing it was an expression of what Nighthawk and Hiccup meant to their village.

****Celebrations**

>After the Song ended, and all the clapping and yelling faded to a murmur, I glanced back up the stone entrance and saw the faces of my younglings. They no doubt heard the commotion and had come closer to see what was going on. I very much wished to join them and wondered if there was a way for me to leave the ring without offending anyone. Nighthawk saw my plight and nudged Hiccup. He understood at once and went quickly over to have a word with his father. Stoick, after a few moments of looking to the eager faces of my children, raised his arms and all noise fell away.

>"I can see, and hear, how much you liked our Finnar's Song. However, you know that many of us can not fit in the Arena. Heh, there's barely enough room for a Gronckle to spread their wings! On this glorious day in Berk why not move everything and everyone up to the meadow where we can all have more room" then, turning to me, he more softly said "and let momma dragons be themselves."
It was then I knew he had been watching for my feelings. When we walked up the ramp, I held my head as high up as Nighthawk did.

All of the company now filed to the meadow that lies beneath the Great Hall and the houses of Stoick and Hiccup. On arrival Nighthawk explained to me the new things I saw. Already present were many barrels, some filled with water, but also ones filled with mead, a special liquid. "Some people will need a stiff drink, Silverwings, as Finnar's Song cut deep" Nighthawk said, looking at some people whose faces were still white and drawn. But there was also much cheer and quickly the glade filled with tables, chairs and a pile of the food called 'bread'. People chattered loudly and time and again burst out in song.

Both human and dragon younglings joyfully dashed through the crowd playing the game of 'bread'. Nighthawk explained the idea was that one team tries to get a bread to one end of the meadow, running with it tucked under an arm, or flinging it to another when being blocked. The other team tries to do exactly the opposite, tackling whoever carries the bread. The stronger dragon's younglings were in no advantage, as the difficult part for them was to keep the bread in one piece and beat the temptation to gobble it down in the first place. Whichever team managed to touch down the bread between two poles won and, besides earning the glory, got to eat it.

Because the festival had been quite sudden, the fishing groups still had to go out and catch the daily amount of fish. While they were gone, the wonderful scent of bloody meat wafted into my nostrils. I learned that was the meat of the fluffy animals, called sheep. Luckily, the humans soon started to char it over fires, as is their custom, so the temptation to taste some was quickly gone.

The afternoon was filled with many humans and dragons coming to greet us. In the end so many had filed past us, it all became a blur. Nighthawk filled me in here and there about the goings-on, as I barely understood. Many a dragoness paraded her younglings to meet ours, something tremendously interesting to my little bunch. The youngsters immediately sniffed each other out and my children would have followed them to go play if we wouldn't have held them back. But soon the spot next to us turned into a playing ground for the young.

>Several mothers told me that they often would go to the meadow next to this one with their children, so they could play together under supervision. My children heard of course and asked me "Can we go there too, mammy, please? Pleeese?" "Well" I said amused "it seems the matter is settled already. That means 'yes', my little ones". They quickly turned around to the last dragoness in line and told her delighted "Mammy says we can come too! We come too!" Facing me again they said "Can we go there now, mammy?" As usual, 'tomorrow' was impossible to explain.

Eventually, Nighthawk saw me struggle, coping with so many impressions. He nudged me and said "Come with me, darling" with a twinkle in his eye. "I know the perfect spot for us!" We left the children once more with Meatlug and her three hatchlings and sneaked off to behind Hiccup's house. Once there, we swiftly climbed up the roof and crawled to the edge to peek down on the activity below. Nighthawk made himself really comfortable and I followed suit. Having settled, we chuckled like two naughty yearlings. Once more I realized that Nighthawk will always be there to help me cope. I looked at his grin and gave him a heartfelt lick.

oOoOoOoOo

****Yaay! Mission accomplished. Toothless has a mate and children on Berk!****

Please write me a review.

There will still be an Epilogue, but mostly, this is it.

Thanks folks, for all the reviews, support and all the fun contact. This way the whole experience of writing has been deeply satisfying.

I thank again ****Tagesh****, my editor, who this time wrote a paragraph or two.

Is this how Dreamworks came to their movie, I wonder, Finnar's Song descending through the ages and somehow landing on their desks?

>One never knows, but the world is full of wondersâ€|<p>

13. Epilogue - A Leap of Faith

****Epilogue - A Leap of Faith****

At the moment I sit on the roof of Hiccup's house. I have been sitting here for quite some time already, mustering up the courage to jump down and take a walk through the village all on my own. My aim is to walk all the way to the Docks and see the fish distribution for myself. Not daring to jump yet, I resort to my favourite pastime: musing.

>I have been on Berk for some time now, but I still cannot get over the warm welcome I received. To meet Astrid and her children, Stoick welcoming me despite my mistakes, the touching ceremony in the Arena, the preparation of our house, so nicely tucked away in the forestâ€|<p>

I think about the day after the welcoming ceremony, when I had ventured out of the woods to visit the common playground to see if any mother with younglings was there. Although my head was still ringing from the clamorous celebrations, I just couldn't hold my yearlings back. Especially Boulder was over-eager to see if there were any playmates present.

>On arrival no one was there, but luckily soon a Zippleback mother came walking up, together with her yearlings. Within moments the children were all over each other.
"Having a headache, dear?" she asked. "You're not the only one who needs to recover from yesterday. What a party! Trust me, Silverwings, you will get accustomed to everything here soon. My name is Wingbeat. We met yesterday, but I guess I'll mention my name again."

>"Thank you, Wingbeat" I replied, searching my brain for something more to say in vain. I just watched the children play instead.
"Nice of you to come to the playground to meet other mothers. You know, a male alone cannot help you with adjusting to life here in the village. Toothless may hover over you all he can, but sometimes you just need sane advice from another mother" she stated matter-of-factly. "How has the journey been?"

"Nice of you to ask" I answered, turning my attention to her. "Well,

not too bad. Uhm, mostly interesting, very interesting even. In the beginning I had to get accustomed to long distance flight again, but soon enough I got into shape. But then the children started to pine. They sat in their travelling baskets, very smugly -have you seen the baskets? But after a couple of days they started to pine and whine. They could not play or move around enough. So every couple of days we had to have a day of rest. That delayed the journey, but it could not be helped. Did you hear them cheer when we flew over the village on arrival?

>"I did! They sure have healthy voices" she giggled. "So how are they now?"
"Fine, just fine. They simply adjust. Just look at them."

>The little Furies were having a difficult time with the Zippleback yearlings. The little Zipplebacks distracted them with one head while nipping their tails with the other. Swirling around didn't help much, as then their tail was nipped by the other head.
"You wait until they meet the Gronckle-hatchlings" Wingbeat commented. "They like to head butt. Luckily they are only six moons old."

>"We met them already" I chuckled, recalling their antics.<p>

"I still have to get accustomed to the humans, eh people" I continued. "They are so-"

>"Loud! They're being loud! But they are a good people. Or, they have become a good people, I should say. You will find there are still tender sentiments among us dragons, although most of us managed to come to terms with the past. We owe Hiccup and Toothless much. But you must have heard that many times by now. As for the people: just wait and see. You will always find a couple of them that you will like."

>"You think so? There are so many of them here. Like yesterday in the Arena, I never saw that many people together. The only humans I know are a people that follow around large herds of reindeer, much like the wolves do. They live in small groups, taking with them portable shelters."
"Large herds of reindeer, you say. Hmmm, how interesting. Are they tasty?"

>"Very tasty. Sometimes I nicked a reindeer. Always at night, so the humans never saw what predator stole them. However, the common deer over there were just as nice. I really miss their taste, as dragons here are not permitted to hunt them. Here it's fish all the time. But-" I added quickly "I like their taste too. They are far more tasty than the fish from the lakes where I came from. And every kind of fish has a different taste!" I did my best to sound enthusiastic and hide my disappointment about the deer, but to no avail.<p>

"You're not good in covering things up, I see" Wingbeat commented dryly. "So you miss the taste of deer. Well, living here comes at a cost for every dragon species, I'm afraid. But on average we like it here. And some day you must tell us all about the lands you came from, really. We're all tremendously curious. -Oh, and about fish, let me warn you: never, I say NEVER, let anyone lure you into eating an eel! EEL! Yellow-black striped HORRORS. They're disgusting! That is, we never tasted them as we believe they are poisonous. But humans eat them, will you believe that? Your Hiccup even threw an eel in BelchBarf's faces once! Let's say he was not amused."

>"My Hiccup? Hi hi hi. Didn't know he was a prankster" I giggled.
"He isn't really, but I will tell you all about him. And also some really embarrassing stories about that mate of yours. What a stiffwings he used to be! He turned around nicely though, you really loosened him up, dear. Quite an achievement! What did you do

with him? No, don't tell me, none of my business. Although, I wouldn't mind if you had a tip or two for my next mating period?" she rattled.

>At seeing my face she quickly added "-Oh, I embarrass you, sorry, I'm being terrible. I talk too much. That is, if I don't talk this fast, my other head starts talking and she's boring me today.<p>

-I'm boring you again?" -The other head now mixed in the conversation.

>-"Don't get started! Sorry Silverwings, I do have better days, when I'm not being rude. I really liked talking to you.
-Me too.

>-You didn't talk to her! Silverwings, my other head thinks she is more refined. Maybe she will do the talking next time, that is, if she is fast enough.
-Thank you for finally admitting I am more refined.

>-Hold your gas, I didn't! You're boring me out of my scales! You just lack the spark."<p>

Looking in bewilderment from one head to the other I stuttered "B-bye".

>"Bye, dear" the fastest head said.
"Indeed" the other head said "next time let me do the talking. Children, come with your BORING mother. Little Furies, grab my tails, I'll drag you over to the next house."

>"Hi hi hi, can we, mammy?" -and off they were, shrieking and cheering while being dragged along.
Nice, strange€

>Oh, I forgot to ask Wingbeat even one question! That's not good. I need to get more social fast, and loosen up. But I am happy to be here, together with my 'stiffwings', hi hi hi.<p>

Now, come on! Get your lazy scales off that roof and start walking! The only thing the humans will do is lift their hands in a greeting, shout "Hi" or just nod. Nothing to be nervous about. Just focus on getting to the Docks.

I was about to jump down when something else popped up in my head, something so sweet: just this morning Pinecone told me she had made a legend. _A legend!_ Where does she get these things from? She keeps surprising me. But she told me her legend and I was much moved as it was a sound story for one so little. I hope I can make her tell it again tonight, to all of us. And if maybe she is too shy for that, or forgets some words, I will help my sweetling.

The legend of us
>-by Pinecone<p>

_First there is mammy and us
>and then there is father and Hiccup
and then they are hurt
>and then they are heroes
and then we all go to father's island

>and here are lots of dragon friends
and lots of human friends

>and we all lived happ'ly ever after.

Oh, my little sweetie.

Now, live the legend and jump, Silverwings!

I jumped.

The end.

oOoOoOoOoOo

Thanks ****Tagesh****, for adding spot-on details.

****Thank you, my readers, for sharing this adventure with me.**** You come from all over the world -will you believe it? Incredible, the way internet connects us, allowing us to share our interests!

On the everyday life of Toothless and his family a lot could be said, but I leave that to the powers of your own imagination.

As for the yearlings: if ever you need a little friend, just summon up your favourite: Boulder will stomp around your room and romp with you. Tumble will bring his joy with him and amuse you with his aerial antics. Heather will nuzzle you and curl up in your lap. Fireweed will rummage through your belongings and make a mess of things, and Pinecone will bring with her the sweetness of her gentle heart.

>Don't the little ones at times just simply beat you: I toiled on this story for a year and a half, and little Pinecone summons it up in just a few sentences, clever thingâ€|<p>

I never knew the yearlings would become so dear to me. But now I leave them with my blessing: "You go, my hearties, and bring joy to the world." -as I believe that is part of why Night Furies are given to us.

****That's all folks! All the best to you.****

oOoOoOoOo

Next is a private note to whoever wishes to read it.

Somehow, while writing this story, I became more aware of the animals we share the planet with. Of course it had everything to do with Hiccup having a special bond with a big, dangerous dragon.

Silverwings' fears have become reality, of course. Humans have become the dominant species on the planet. Dragons have vanished, they disappeared into myth, though I like very much that in the first "How to train your dragon" book of Cressida Cowell it is told that dragons went to sleep at the ocean's floor, leaving no trace behind, to maybe awake 'as there may yet come a time when Heroes are needed once more'.

In reality, many animals are in danger of becoming extinct, like many of the largest and most powerful animals already have. I started to care and, long story short, I became an animal advocate, mostly on behalf of elephants.

On behalf of elephants, here's my plea to you:

_No circus animals

>Please avoid circuses with elephants and other animals. Even if staff care, they cannot begin to meet the animal's needs.

_No ivory

>Please do not buy anything made of ivory. Elephants are poached and shot for their tusks. It is feared that if the current rate of poaching continues, in some 20 years' time there will be no elephants left in the wild. It is even worse for rhinos, who are shot for their horn.

_No elephant rides

>Please do not take a ride on an elephant's back. Their spine is not built for that, and they suffer from it.

_No support of street-begging elephants

>If you visit Asia, or live there, do not give anything to 'street begging' elephants. Elephants should not be in cities, the noise and fast-food is detrimental to their (mental) health.

_No elephant paintings

>Do not pay for elephants making paintings, or doing other tricks. They are often brutally and painfully trained to do so.

_Especially avoid paying for baby-elephants to do tricks. Cute baby elephants are the latest fashion. These infants are mostly snatched from the wild at the cost of a whole herd, and are trained to do tricks by horrific methods. If you wish to see what the crush-training is about, look up "_Baby Elephant Smuggling Exposed" on Youtube, or if you have a strong stomach "_Elephant training abuse (AAA video) in English"_. _

_Also avoid shows with orcas

>Please avoid facilities that show orcas, belugas, dolphins, walruses and other marine mammals. Even if the facility is high quality, they cannot avoid disrupting families, and restocking is a problem (inbreeding, high mortality).

_Don't litter

>Please do not litter or throw plastic in the water. Sea mammals, fish and seabirds eat it and subsequently starve to death as it accumulates in their stomachs.

Please DO support animal welfare at times, or at some stage of your life.

_Thank you. _

14. New story about Toothless & family!

Hello dear friends.

Many of you have wished to read some more about Toothless and his family. So check out a oneshot, that Revanhun wrote for me as a present. In my turn, I much like to share it with you.

>It's called "Silverwings â€" Myriads of Memories". You can find it through my profile.

>Enjoy.<p>

End

file.